



# **FOLKLORE AND MOTIFS IN JAMINI ROY'S PAINTINGS**

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IN

**FINE ARTS**

By

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

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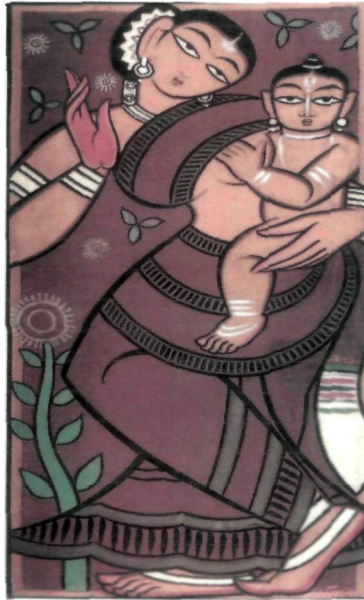
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# ABSTRACT



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# ABSTRACT

**Jamini Roy** – The very name evokes images of bright, rich colours, large symbolic eyes, bold, flowing, curved lines and a sense of the theatrical. An artist whose work was difficult to define – contemporary art or folk art. An artist who was one of the fathers of the Indian contemporary art movement. Jamini Roy was born in 1887 in a village in the Bankura district of West Bengal - an area well known for various forms of folk art and craft especially pottery and clay work. He was the first Indian artist to consciously model his work entirely on folk art.

In the present study we are going to discuss “Folklore and motifs in Jamini Roy’s paintings”

By the word 'folk-lore' a folklorist means myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk verses, folk beliefs, folk superstitions, customs, folk drama, folk song, folk music, folk dance, ballads, folk cults, folk gods and goddesses,

rituals, festivals, magic, witchcraft, folk art and craft, and variety of forms of artistic expression of oral culture or rural and tribal folks or unlettered city dwellers that bind man to man. Most of the people from the rural Bengal are guided by the above mentioned attributes. In Chapter I we tried to explore the real meaning of folklore in context to Indian folk art.

Folk art in Bengal includes several forms of painting, painted toys, terracotta, kanthas (quilted embroidery) and alpanas (floor decorations). These are all interrelated and reflect the lifestyle and culture of the people, their rites, customs and celebrations. Chapter II describes historical background of Bengal art and various folk arts of this province. Jamini Roy was essentially rooted to the soil. Even though he virtually spent his life in the city of Kolkata. Perhaps an inner tranquility helped him to maintain a certain calm in spite of the tension of the life around him. Chapter III gives a detailed study of Jamini Roy's life, distinct phases of his life, and his early works.



It goes on to describe several events that influenced him to turn to indigenous sources for inspiration.

From about the mid 1920's Roy started experimenting with folk art styles. Initially he drew a lot of inspiration from Kalighat Pat paintings as well as terracotta work on temple walls of Bengal especially Bishnupur temple. He also showed his fascination for the paintings of peasant painters of Bengal who used to sell their work at the rural bazaars. From this, evolved the Jamini Roy the world knows so well. The lines became bolder and simpler, the colours rich and the images lyrical. Over time, Roy moved away from canvas and started using different types of fabric, cloth, wood, mats, etc. and started using colours and pigments made from vegetables. He selected themes from joys and sorrows of everyday life of rural Bengal, religious themes like-Ramayana, Sri Chaitanya , Radha-Krishna and Jesus Christ were also painted by him. Chapter IV gives an explicit study of his themes, style and technique, with a

brief account of the women in his paintings. The chapter ends with the critical appreciation of various critics.

Jamini Roy gave a novel and daring direction to the art of colonial India by evolving his idiom of expression out of Bengal's folk-painting. He successfully bridged the gap that developed in the cultures of the traditional rural Bengal and the colonial Kolkata. It was Jamini Roy who provided a broader base to the art of modern India by enriching it with ethnic substances. The art of Jamini Roy was a milestone in contemporary Indian Art. Not only did it break away from the notion that art was the sole preserve of the upper classes and had to necessarily follow European styles but it also brought to fore the folk art language. Introduction of bold yet simple and minimal use of lines also brought in the new wave of reducing images to the bare essentials and yet tell the story emphatically.

Thus the aim of Jamini Roy at the formalistic level can be simply defined as a love for simple uncluttered shapes,

vibrantly coloured and organised in a simple manner derived from various complex traditions. At the emotional level his aim appears to be to create a harmony between an imaginative concept and his technical expertise. Occasionally, his paintings suggest a social message but that is always indirect and veiled. It is therefore, his formal characteristic as also the easily infusible aesthetic that Jamini Roy transmitted to some of his contemporaries and younger artists.

*DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS  
AND AUNT  
LATE MRS. NAFEEES RAO*



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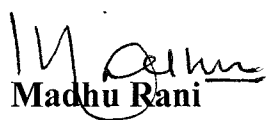
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## Certificate

This is to certify that the research work embodied in this thesis entitled **“Folklore and Motifs in Jamini Roy’s Paintings”** has been carried out by **Ms. Seema Khan** under my supervision.

As far as my knowledge is concerned, this work is original and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree in this or any other university. She is allowed to submit the work for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts**.

  
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*I bow in reverence to Almighty God the benevolent; the merciful who showered his gracious blessings upon me, showed me the path of righteousness and enabled me to achieve this target.*

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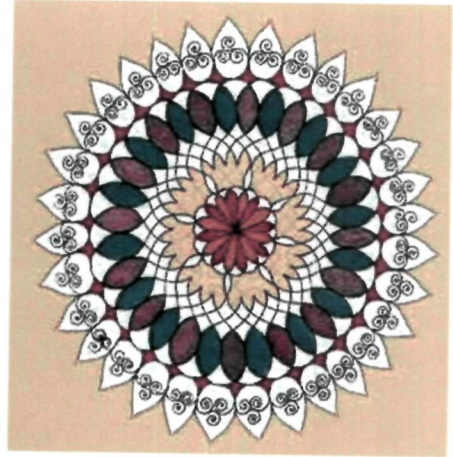
*Last but not the least, I am thankful to the staff of Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., Seminar Library and staff of Fine Arts Department for their day to day help.*

**(Seema Khan)**



# CHAPTER – I

## INTRODUCTION



## **FOLKLORE: NATURE AND SCOPE**

Folklore is a general term for the verbal, spiritual, and material aspects of any culture that are transmitted orally, by observation, or by imitation. People sharing a culture may have in common an occupation, language, ethnicity, age, or geographical location. This body of traditional material is preserved and passed on from generation to generation, with constant variations shaped by memory, immediate need or purpose, and degree of individual talent. The word *folklore* was coined in 1846 by the English antiquary William John Thoms to replace the term popular antiquities.

By the word 'folk-lore' a folklorist means myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk verses, folk beliefs, folk superstitions, customs, folk drama, folk song, folk music, folk dance, ballads, folk cults, folk gods and goddesses, rituals, festivals, magic, witchcraft, folk art and craft, and variety of forms of artistic expression of oral culture or rural and tribal folks or unlettered city dwellers that bind man to man.

Many folklore scholars have attempted to define folklore, although it is difficult to give a definition of folklore. It's one of those things

where the more we know about it, the harder it gets to define.

According to Dan Ben-Amos (1972)

*Folklore is very much an organic phenomenon. . . . It is possible to distinguish three basic conceptions of the subject underlying many definitions; accordingly, folklore is one of these three: a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art. . . . Folklore is not thought of as existing without or apart from a structured group. . . its existence depends on its social context. . . . As an artistic process, folklore may be found in any communicative medium; musical, visual, kinetic, or dramatic.*

He further said *“Folklore reveals and helps us understand our humanity. Communities throughout time and space have created stories, songs, dance, music, rituals, customs, festivals, and various material artistic genres to make sense of and to celebrate the world and the human condition. Our expressions flourish when tradition connects communal wisdom with innovative inspiration. As its name indicates, folklore involves both "folk" (a group of people) and "lore" (creative expressions). Hence folklorists study "artistic communication in small groups",<sup>1</sup>*

Meaning, folklorists focus upon the relationship of individual creativity to the collective order. Folklorists are equally concerned with aesthetic and expressive aspects of culture and the people and societies that make and respond to creative acts.

Traditional arts, belief, traditional ways of work and leisure, adornment and celebrations are cultural ways in which a group maintains and passes on a shared way of life. This “group identity” may be defined by age, gender, ethnicity, avocation, region, occupation, religion, socioeconomic niche, or any other basis of association. As New York folklorist Ben Botkin wrote in 1938,

*“Every group bound together or by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore. Into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular, and even ‘literary,’ but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole”.*<sup>2</sup>

Alan Dundes, in 1965 said that

*“It is possible. . .to define both folk and lore in such a way that even the beginner can understand what folklore is. The term “folk” can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own.”*<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologists and Folklorists of previous generations sometimes lamented that an age of high technology and global capitalism



would result in the demise of “traditional” cultures. According to Stith Thompson

*“The common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record.”<sup>4</sup>*

In this regard John L. Mish said that

*“The entire body of ancient popular beliefs, customs, and traditions which have survived among the less educated elements of civilized societies until today. It thus includes fairy tales, myths, and legends, superstitions, festival rites, traditional games, folk songs, popular sayings, arts, crafts, folk dances, and the like.”<sup>5</sup>*

Folklore is not static. Tradition is not static, nor is it in the past. Neither folklore nor tradition remains fixed, for they are not things, but processes as mutable, as *dynamic* as the lives and minds of the humans who create them. The art is merely the product of the *process* of convergence between individual, willed creativity and communal life. As Glassie writes in 1993,

*tradition “is rooted in volition and it flowers in variation and innovation. It opposes the alien and imposed . . .” so that the “center of folklore is the merger of individual creativity and social order. Philosophically, politically, my discipline upholds the human right to the construction of a meaningful universe through artistic*

*action; it stresses the interdependence of the personal, the social, the sacred; the aesthetic, the ethical, the cosmological; the beautiful, the good, the true. Practically, folklore is the study of human creativity in its own context".<sup>6</sup>*

## **CLASSIFICATION OF FOLKLORE**

Folklore is not restricted to rural communities but may commonly be found in cities, and that, rather than dying out, it is still part of the learning of all groups from family units to nations, albeit changing in form and function. In this way Folklore has come to be regarded as part of the human learning process and an important source of information about the history of human life.

Folklore materials may be roughly classified into five general areas: ideas and beliefs, traditions, narratives, folk sayings, and the folk arts.

Folk beliefs include ideas about the whole range of human concerns, from the reasons and cures for diseases to speculation concerning life after death. This category therefore includes folkloristic beliefs (superstitions), magic, divination, witchcraft, and apparitions such as ghosts and fantastic mythological creatures. The second classification, that of traditions, includes material

dealing with festival customs, games, and dances; cookery and costume might also be included. The third category, narratives, includes the ballad and the various forms of folktales and folk music, all of which may be based in part on real characters or historical events. The category of folk sayings includes proverbs and nursery rhymes, verbal charms, and riddles.

Folk arts, the fifth and only nonverbal category, covers any form of art, generally created anonymously among a particular people, shaped by and expressing the character of their community life.

*Folk arts are traditional cultural expressions through which a group maintains and passes on its shared way of life.*<sup>7</sup> They express a group's sense of beauty, identity and values. Folk arts are usually learned informally through performance, by example or in oral tradition among families, friends, neighbors and co-workers rather than through formal education. A living cultural heritage, folk arts link the past and present. Never static, folk arts change, as they are adapted to new circumstances while they maintain their traditional qualities.

The folk arts and crafts are those that are learned as part of the lifestyle of a community whose members share identity based upon

ethnic origin, religion, occupation, or geographical region. Highly varied, these traditions are shaped by the aesthetics and values of the community and are passed from generation to generation.

Folk art is not easily amenable to definition. Every time we use the term 'folk art' we need to redefine the sense in which we use it.

Here, we mean by 'folk art' primarily non-professional art, art practiced in any community by ordinary men and women in various walks of life, who have undergone no regular training or apprenticeship, who do not belong to any professional guilds and do not practice it as a trade at the behest of other but for decorative and ritual use in their homes and communities.

Such an art exists separately from the stream of professional art, although when it grows in body and momentum it enters into various relationships with the professional art and craft traditions of the time. As a result, the folk artist makes use of motifs drawn from the professional artist giving them a change of meaning and adding to them a certain earthiness and vigour; the professional artist draws on folklore and folk forms in his turn.



## **FOLK ART OF INDIA**

In India folk art was discovered in Bengal and began to be collected by the Tagores, Ajit Ghosh and other artists and connoisseurs early in 20th century. In more ancient times while folk art undoubtedly existed there was hardly any consciousness of it. The discovery of folk art is linked to the development of national consciousness: provinces, isolated pockets of territory and regional areas now regarding their own folk art as a special and unique heritage.<sup>8</sup> Maharashtra, M.P. and Orissa are still continued to be the important centres of folk art where a large number of tribal communities are settled and their descendants are still restoring their heritage through their artistic creativity.<sup>9</sup>

Some forms of folk art is found in most provinces of India in local variations. The range of work is immense: terracotta's, wooden and clay toys, dolls and images, paintings, objects of pith and cane, rag, embroidery, metal objects of miscellaneous materials. Most of them require some form of craftsmanship, and show a lively imagination and an uncluttered understanding of the materials. The basic characteristic of folk art is that its forms are simple, bold and clear.

Their strong living shapes and bright colours contribute to a vigour and animation not to be found in more complex art.

According to Jaya Appasamy, the following are the common stylistic characteristics in folk-art:

1. Preference for simple outline, choice of typically representational lines and rejection of accessory elements.
2. A simplification of colours and volumes so that shading is eliminated.
3. Exaggeration of gestures for expressive reasons and primitive use of relative size.
4. Stylization of motifs to create decorative elements.
5. Repetition of lines, of entire figures, of dots for intensive or rhythmical purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Folk art is purposeful, but non-commercial. The present day contemporary artist proclaims that art is for art sake. The ancient aestheticians of India repeatedly emphasize that Art must have a purpose; Art must stand for lofty ideas.

In folk tradition, art is a nourishment to the daily life of the people. Whether he is a Tamilnadu potter who creates a massive terracotta, Aiyandar or a Madhya Pradesh tribal who creates Pithora painting, at

the moment of creation, the poverty-stricken, illiterate folk, becomes a master-crafts-man who can create marvelous plastic and visual forms with a creative genius handed over to him by generations from time immemorial.

## **EFFECT OF TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY**

In folk art the direct effect of the environment emerges in the form, style and material of product. People living in mountainous and forest areas are adept at handling wood, while those in deltaic plains create fired objects from clay, especially terracotta. Pith is used where available also palm leaves and fibres, while weaving gives rise to woven and embroidered clothes. Paintings on floors, walls and papers vary from places to places and may be connected to myths, special festivals, rites and other specific occasions.<sup>12</sup>

Topography and geography have much control over the medium of art. In the case of Uttar Pradesh, we can find folk paintings on the walls of the houses. Whereas in Assam, one cannot find wall paintings because most of the walls of the house are built with cane or bamboo.

Diversity in the topography and geography of our country gives room for multiple styles in folk art. Each part of the country with its own trees and plants, birds and animals, hills and dales has inspired Indian folk artists to have multiple metaphors, series of symbols and innumerable images to build a rich treasure-house of art. Out of various folk styles some are described below.

### **Pata paintings (Orissa)**

Artists who make paintings on walls of temples and on cloth are called *chitrakars* in Orissa state. A very prestigious assignment of *chitrakars* is executed in the temple of the triad Jagannath, Balbhadr, and Subhadra in the coastal town of Puri in Orissa. The town attracts a large number of pilgrims from all over India for the *rath yatra* or car festival of Lord Jagannath. Just before the festival, the three wooden idols of the triad in the temple are taken behind closed doors to be freshly painted. During this period, the triad, painted on freshly painted cloth, are hung on doors for prayers. The paintings of the triad are done by highly competent *chitrakars*. These artists also do smaller paintings on religious themes for sale to pilgrims.

### **Garoda (story tellers of Gujarat)**

*Garodas* hailed from northern Gujarat and Rajasthan. They travelled from village to village with their painted paper scrolls and narrated popular legends. Painted scroll were usually divided into 19 compartments by thick, black horizontal lines. The style of painting in scrolls was marked by use of bright colours and thick outlining of figures in black. The scroll depicted popular deities,



**Pata Painting (Orissa)**



**Garoda (story tellers of Gujarat)**



**Tanjavore Painting**

for example Krishna, Ganesha, Siva, Goddess Lakshmi and scenes from local legends, like the story of Dana Bhagat, Raja Harishchandra, Krishna legends with local variations of Mahabharata and Ramayana.

### **Tanjavore Painting**

Tanjavore paintings are practiced in south India. The style was essentially of Tamil origin but it spread gradually to Andhra Pradesh and in Karnataka. Tanjavore art is practiced by artisans from traditional families. They were commissioned by devotees to make paintings of Hindu Gods mainly infant Krishna. This folk art is patronised by the affluent who have custom made paintings created which are adorned with gold and genuine precious stones.

### **Chitrakathi Paintings (Maharashtra)**

Chitrakathi are a community of migrating story tellers found all over Maharashtra and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. They made a series of single sheets of paintings. All paintings belonging to one story were kept in a bundle called *pothi*. Theme of a Chitrakathi painting includes stories on local versions of Ramayana and Mahabharata and mythical themes. Use of brownish





**Chitrakathi Painting (Maharashtra)**



**Kalighat Painting (Kolkata)**



**Madhubani Painting (Bihar)**



tones of stone colours gives a remarkable effect. Figures in paintings were generally stylised.

### **Kalighat Painting( Kolkata)**

Kalighat is a place of pilgrimage. It is a centre of art with a distinct style of Indian paintings known as Kalighat pata painting. Kalighat painters are mostly Bengali Hindu of pata community, who came from rural Bengal to Calcutta and found in Kalighat a centre, which could sustain them. Their work was religious in nature and puranic in content. The subjects were usually mythological and gods and goddesses. Painters used local paper, which was thin and cheap and water colour easily available in the city.

**Madhubani Paintings (Bihar)** It is a domestic art practiced from house to house. Through this religious symbolism is expressed in a beautiful way. In Mithila, women folk of all communities paint. Madhubani paintings are primarily wall paintings like frescoes. Most famous are Kohber paintings (marriage alpana). The central theme is love and fertility. Passion, love and desire are reduced to symbols to suggest and evoke the mood, to create the atmosphere and environment. The paintings are done by the household ladies as an ordinary domestic art.



**Bhitti chitra or Wall Decorations**



**Decorative Alpana**

## **Bhitti chitra or Wall Decorations**

Bhitti chitra or mud wall painting is an attempt by simple villagefolk to beautify bare mud walls of village huts and its surroundings with auspicious folk motifs called *mandanas*. They adorn clay walls with puranic gods and ornamental forms of birds, serpents, flowers and geometrical designs on festive occasions. The ground is never left blank. The deity always occupies a central place. Floral and animal forms provide an appropriate decorative design, and at places and in some occasions, only geometric arrangements are used as motif. The paint is prepared by mixing *rati* (colour made of red earth) and *khadia* (white chalk) in water. A cement plastered wall of today is not a good canvas for this art.

## **Alpana**

*Alpana* is an art for women both in villages and in cities. It is practiced within the boundaries of a house. This art includes a variety of *bhumi chitra* or floor decorations known as *chowk*, *alpana*, *mandala* and *rangoli*. It is made as a daily routine and is also used on ritualistic and auspicious occasions. Mud floor is an ideal base for alpana. The history of alpana designs goes back to the Vedic period. The Aryans, authors of Vedas, worshipped fire

and other forces of nature. Because of their profound knowledge of the Supreme Reality, they expressed their gratitude to the creator by performing *yajnas* or sacrificial ceremonies. For this occasion they decorated worship area with designs composed with dots, lines, circles drew them with a paste of *haldi* (turmeric) and *kumkum* (vermillion).

Alpana, also known as Rangoli or Kolam and by other names, is a traditional art of decorating courtyards and walls of Indian houses, places of worship and sometimes eating places as well. The powder of white stone, lime, rice flour and other cheap paste is used to draw intricate and ritual designs. Each state of India has its own way of painting Rangoli.

One characteristic of Rangoli is that it is painted by commoners. On some special occasions it is painted in every home, with or without formal training in Rangoli art. The art is typically transferred from generation to generation and from friend to friend.

Women use their bare fingers or a brush to create various designs from sandstone powder or grain-flour. Sometimes colors and petals are used in addition to flour paste. Some women are so skilled with their fingers that they can create figures of deities, chariots,

temples, etc., on the finely layered floor. Petals of various flowers, such as oleanders, cosmos, zenia, chrysanthemums, and green leaves provide the artist the ability to work out various patterns and colors. In the evenings of festive occasions, when oil lamps are lit, and the atmosphere is cool and pleasant, such floral designs create the atmosphere of a well-planned divine garden. This Rangoli garden surrounds the sacred spot where pooja (prayer) is performed or a child is seated for his or her birthday, naming ceremony or thread ceremony. Newly-weds also receive guests in such decorated surroundings when the wedding celebrations are ongoing.

These folk paintings are made in Indian villages, by both men and women, for ornamentation of their abodes, portrayals of their gods and for their various rituals. All these paintings were produced in a variety of styles and themes. History, sociology and geography infused the painting of each region with local flavour. To some extent their style and quality depended on the materials available in the place in which they were executed. These very factors help us to identify them region wise. And yet, through all the apparent diversity there runs an underlying unity, which makes them 'Indian'.

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# CHAPTER – II

## ART OF BENGAL





## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Bengal is an Indian province in North Eastern India, occupying the fertile areas of the delta of the Ganges. It has often been an independent Kingdom and its people, who are of mixed stock, speak Bengali. Bengali is one of the major modern languages of India arising from a Sanskritic base and was already a separate language in late Pala times.<sup>1</sup> Bengal has a long tradition of painting activities from a fairly early period which continues to date with not much interruption. With the advancement of time the art of painting in Bengal took distinct turns at various crossroads of human history.

From around the beginning of the ninth century A.D., we start getting stone carved and metal cast sculptures with remarkably common stylistic features from as far apart places as Bodh-Gaya in the west to Comilla in the east and from Kushinagar in the north to Sundarbans in the south. As we go on getting them from the present day Bihar, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal, till the beginning of the thirteenth century, we became aware of the common stylistic development of the art of sculpture in this vast region. The same can be said about the illustrated manuscripts painted between the

tenth and the thirteenth century, commonly called the Pala paintings, as the earliest of these Buddhist manuscripts was commissioned by a Pala King. We have to regard the Pala-Sena art as an important landmark in the history of art of Bengal. Because this homogeneous body of art had a unified developmental history and a well recognizable distinctiveness.

The ninth to the thirteenth century sculptures and paintings are by no means the earliest objects of art from Bengal. Besides the pre-historic and the proto-historic terracottas found from various sites of West Bengal, a large number of terracotta toys, dolls, small votive figures, small ritual figurines, seals with designs, and images in relief and sealings with incised designs and images have been found from Chandraketugarh in North 24-Parganas and Tamluk in Midnapur and other places of deltaic West Bengal. On stratigraphic considerations these are dated between the second century B.C. and third century A. D. While a large majority of these are folkish objects with strong local characteristics, the votive figures and ritual figurines exhibit attempts to come to terms with the pan-Indian iconography, being developed from the Sunga through the Kushana periods. When large stone carved and metal cast sculptures began to be commissioned in Bengal, from around the

fourth century A.D., the Puranic Brahmanical and the Buddhist iconography had taken such a commanding hold over the actual process of making of the ritual objects, that the Purva-desiya Bhaskaras had to imitate the Madhya-desiya models. This gave rise to the eastern school of Gupta sculpture in Bihar and Bengal

The extension and consolidation of the Turko-Afgan domination led to the demise of the power of the earlier patrons of high arts, which in its turn disrupted the continuity of the earlier tradition of satriya-margiya art. Bengal art came to a turning point. Recent discovery of some fragmentary evidence of fifteenth century illustrated manuscripts from Husain Shahi Bengal, the glorious period of development of Bengali literature and music, has dispelled the notion that the Sultanate period of Bengal was totally bereft of visual arts. Stylistically these paintings bear family resemblances with the contemporary Sultanate Paintings, especially of the Chaurapanchaika variety from Jaunpur.

Although there is no historical evidence to prove it, one may not be wholly wrong in assuming the distinctiveness of Bengal art stemmed from continuous though not unchanging, traditions of folk arts and crafts. The woodcarvings and terracotta sculptures of different periods from different parts of Bengal exhibit some

common and persistent stylistic features. The subterranean presence of these folk elements in all efflorescence of high art gave to the Bengal high arts their distinctiveness. Indeed some varieties of regional high art of Bengal have been sophisticated versions of folkish prototypes.

The situation, however changed drastically after 1765, when the British East India Company took over the revenue management of Subah Bangla (the present-day west Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar and Orissa) and especially after 1793 when by the enactment of permanent settlement the Company's government changed the system of land revenue administration so completely that the whole gamut of land-centred human relations in rural areas changed. These changes were compounded by wilful suppression of Indian crafts and manufactures to turn India into an importer of machine-made goods from Britain after 1813. All these factors disrupted the continuity of the more professional rural and arts. Bereft of patronage, the rural artisans and craftsmen either became marginalised peasants or started to migrate to Kolkata the developing port city for the colonial expropriation.

But it was the Kolkata-ward migration of urban artists from the disbanded courtly ateliers of northern India that was bringing about

the decisive changes in Indian art scene. Towards the fourth quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the court of the puppet nawabs of Murshidabad, the East India Company's rule had firmly entrenched in Bengal and the hub of activities had shifted to Kolkata. European Painters had already started coming into India in search of fortune. European prints (engravings, etchings etc.) had started coming into India even before that if the incursion of European prints and European artists had been instrumental in the waning of the medieval traditions of paintings, the decisive factor had been the emergence of new classes of patrons with differing tastes. An art school was established in Kolkata in 1854, with the blessing of the colonial government, resulting in making pre-art school artists redundant.

Apart from the migrant rural artists who took to painting in oils, there were groups of artisans who started migrating to Kolkata in search of employment. Some of them, with skills that could be used for the newly established nexus for printing designs and images, began to be employed by the various survey offices, being set up from the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. After having picked up the techniques of intaglio and relief printing of matrices made by metal engraving, etching, aquatint, wood engraving and wood cut,

they would retire and set up printmaking establishments in Chitpur region of north Kolkata to cater to the ever expanding needs of the burgeoning vernacular printing and publishing industry. Even the entry of art school trained print-makers with their equipment for lithographic printing as competitors, could not make much of the dent in their market; for the burgeoning market had space for everyone, till the coming into vogue of processed block printing of designs and images in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The most significant body of drawings and paintings of nineteenth century Bengal, however, are the Kalighat pats, created by a close knit group of clay modellers and painters from rural areas who settled down in the vicinity of the Kali temple of Kalighat locality in Calcutta, in search of employment.

Although the stylistic ancestry of Kalighat pats can be traced back to the rural pats of Bengal, the differences between them make Kalighat pats more significant as works of Art. Yet, the curious fact is that these drawings and paintings on rectangular sheets of untreated paper surface, done in ink and water soluble opaque colours, were made as cheap souvenirs for selling these to the pilgrims to Kali temple at throw away prices. Social significance apart, the style of figuration, division of flat unadorned pictorial

space by rhythmic lines, and the division of the same pictorial space into mosaic of flat colour masses etc. make Kalighat pats aesthetically satisfying objects of art. Despite their being earliest examples of urban popular art, their art, their form and substance held out levels of promise for future generations of art practitioners. The Kalighat pat, once again proved the innate strength, resilience and adaptability of the folk art traditions of Bengal. But the painting activities in Bengal with a definite regional character had originated and developed only at the beginning of the 20th century. The new style known commonly as the Neo Bengal School gained immediate acceptance all over India and later became internationally known. Bengal School is an important episode in the history of Bengal art. In this regard a brief account is given in the following pages.

## **ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF BENGAL SCHOOL**

An extremely long period of British rule and domination awakened the spirit of Indian nationalism and the Indian people's search for a national identity.

This in turn gave birth to various movements in social and cultural fields. The arts were no exception. 'The Bengal School' is the name given to a new style of painting that was the first aesthetic development that appeared at the turn of the century.

E.B.Havell, a connoisseur and promoter of Indian art, was appointed Principal of Calcutta Art School in 1896. In 1905 Havell persuaded Abanindranath Tagore to join the School as Vice-Principal and together they introduced traditional Indian techniques of art in the school. Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Kar, Asit Kaumar Halder, K Venkatappa, Samarendranath Gupta, Kshitindranath Majumder, Sailendranath Dey joined as disciples of Abanindranath and helped introduce a new revivalist style of painting. In the nationalistic fervour of the time it gained tremendous popularity and spread all over India. In fact, the 'Bengal School', as it was known, was the first recognized art style of modern India.



Havell and Abanindranath insisted on the revival of traditional Indian art styles. In fact, the revivalist art introduced by Abanindranath was actually a synthesis of Ajanta, Mughal, European naturalism, and Japanese wash techniques. This new art style, done mostly in watercolour and depicting Indian religious, mythological, historical and literary subjects, also gained the approval of the Indian nationalists. Abanindranath preferred historical and literary subjects rather than religious and mythical ones, and with his sophisticated taste, sense of proportion, and observation he could impart a quality of grace and charm to his works.

Lord Zetland has defined the aim of the Bengal School of art as:

*"The new school is consciously and intentionally idealistic. It is the avowed intention of its makers to escape from 'the photographic vision,' and to secure an introspective outlook on things, which takes one away from the material objectives of life to a rarefied atmosphere of beauty and romance. Instead of busying themselves with recording the superficial aspects of phenomena, they have worked with a deeper motive and a profounder suggestion, seeking to wean the human mind from the obvious and the external reality of the sense, disdaining to imitate nature for its own sake, and striving to find significative forms to suggest the formless Infinity which is hidden behind the physical world of forms."*<sup>2</sup>

In the early decades of the 20th century, the Bengal School as a whole became popular, but some individual creative figures attempted to go beyond prevalent trends and tried to gain artistic independence and individuality. Gaganendranath Tagore, Jamini Roy and Rabindranath Tagore are among the best known of these artists. Gaganendranath, the elder brother of Abanindranath, was the first genuine cartoon artist in India to comment upon political and social realities. He was also the first to treat painting as an arrangement of line, form, color and light. He has done paintings of building and interiors by treating light and shade in a somewhat Cubist manner. His mythical and spiritual contemplation pieces, done in form and colour, sometimes reach the state of near-abstraction.

Though the merits of folk-art was not completely neglected at the time, nobody before Jamini Roy could think of applying it in the arena of mainstream art. By abandoning the naturalistic style and taking inspiration from Bengali folk art, he opened a new vista for modern Indian painting. He abandoned the three-dimensional modulation, that is to say, the stress on perspective and light and shade of naturalistic western art. Instead, he took to the two-

dimensional format of flat colouring and undulated outline of the folk tradition. He created out of the folk mannerism a more sophisticated and harmonious form of painting which expressed a new kind of simple beauty while retaining a kind of Indianness.

As a result, the Bengal School became a kind of a sentimental and decorative art and did not develop any further.

Critics like W.G.Archer think that though this movement did not introduce modern art in India “it served as a necessary step to a second movement which begins in the middle of the 1920’s and includes the paintings of Shergil, Jamini Roy and George Keyt. These painters were not directly influenced by Havell yet it was he who made their work possible.”<sup>3</sup>



**LAKSHMI – SHARA**  
Teraracotta plaque. Fridpur, Bengal.  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century



**KANTHA EMBROIDERY**  
Jessore, Bengal.  
Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## **FOLK ART OF BENGAL**

With our rich folk and tribal art tradition, every region in the country has a unique art form that has sustained and evolved over centuries. At the same time there are several similarities in folk arts across regions, such as mythological themes, and bold and vibrant colours.

The tradition of “Folk Arts” in Bengal constitutes the distinctive national art of the Bengali people. It is national in more senses than one. In the first place it is rooted in the culture of Bengal and has a continuous history of almost unadulterated development dating back to remote antiquity and is not based on mere imitation of any other tradition of any other part of India or of any other period. Secondly, its practice is not confined to a small number of art amateurs but is widespread among large masses of people of both sexes in rural Bengal. Thirdly, it is intimately related to their social life and expresses their moral and spiritual ideas. And lastly, in its motifs and style it has the distinct and national stamp of the formal idiom and spirit of the Bengali race.<sup>4</sup>

The Bengali tradition of village art was discovered in the nineteen-twenties, and due to the work of Ajit Ghosh and G.S.Dutt its

character became apparent. The art of decorative floor and wall designs in tempera and of coloured embroidery exists in a highly perfected form among women all over rural Bengal, and the designs are remarkable for their infinite variety, originality and freshness. Dr. Abanindranath Tagore drew public attention of the art of decorative floor designs in an important monograph published by him. But the art of decorative wall designs in tempera, as practiced by women of Western Bengal, was first discovered by G.S. Dutt in the year 1931. It is marked with great hereditary skill in the use of colour designs as well as vigour of line and beauty of form. The skill of the village women in drawing decorative floor designs in the floors and plinths of their houses, as well as in the floors of their courtyards, is marked by extra-ordinary hereditary genius. .

In pottery, great skill of form and colour design is displayed by the village potters all over Bengal, as well as by their women. The motifs in all these cases are taken from nature, and illustrate the close touch, which the life of these village people had with nature. The motifs are also taken from simple religious subjects connected with the story of Krishna and other mythological subjects, which form part of the religious life of the people.<sup>5</sup>

In almost every district of West Bengal, colonies of Patuas or village artists were found to exist. Many of these gained a livelihood by decorating earthenware plates and pitches by painting the clay images of gods and goddesses used at annual festivals. Some, however, still followed the exact profession suggested by the title 'Patua'.<sup>6</sup>

## PATUA ART

In Bengali, "Pat" means "roll" and "Patua" or "Chitrakar" mean "Painter". The origin of the painted rolls is very ancient. We could find some in the Pharaoh's graves in Egypt. In India the first description of these painted rolls can be found in a sacred text dated 200 BC. Even today, this art form is still used mainly in West Bengal and Bihar State.

This primitive art of painting practiced by the professional primitive painters who are known as 'JADU PATUA' or the Duari-Patuas' ('Jadu'-literally magic; 'Duari'-those who wait at the door) are a community of painters, still found in Midnapur, Bankura, Birbhum and Manbhum in West Bengal, and Singhbhum and the Santhal Parganas in Bihar. They make a living by going from village to village inhabited by the santhals with pictures on long scrolls of paper, painted nowadays with bazaar colours.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to the scroll-like folk paintings Phad and Pichwai of Rajasthan and Pithora of Gujarat, Patua is a folk art from West Bengal. Patuas are lengthy paintings that narrate mythological stories in sequence. The Patuas (derived from the word Pata which



means a painting, patua also implies a painter) used vegetable dyes to paint rolls of cloth.

Mostly iconic, these were narrated by the 'Patuas' who were also singers. They were paid or offered food for their efforts and this was a way of earning their livelihood. They show these and tell the story.

The scroll stem from an old tradition of 'Paralaukik-Chitra', i.e. the picture of a dead person enjoys earthly comforts in the world thereafter. After a death in a village home, the 'Duari-Patua' would appear in a painting of the deceased, complete in every respect except for the iris of the eyes. The implication was that the dead person was wandering blindly in the other world when his eyesight could easily be restored for a small consideration. The dead man's relatives would provide the 'Patua' with a little money, or some articles of daily use for transmission to the deceased whereupon the 'Patua' would do the 'chakshudana' i.e. 'restore' the sight by filling in the iris of the eyes on the paintings. The practice gradually ceased to be so exclusively funeral.

The subjects painted by the Patuas in West Bengal are extremely varied. Their audience is mainly Hindu or Muslim, sometimes

Catholic. The themes are inspired by the sacred texts of each of these religions, 'the deeds of Krishna', 'the adventures of Rama'. In Birbhum, Bankura and the Santhal Parganas a favourite theme of Satyapir, a muslim holyman who rode on a leopard, while other popular subjects were the myths of Santhals. Mostly their subjects are religious subjects but also profane ones which go from historical epics (local, national or even international: they could evoke the French Revolution as well as the bombing in Hiroshima) to some more general themes (painting about the cyclone which devastated the Midnapur district, or more recently, Mother Teresa's death). They also speak about political subjects, like the regrouping of the land or the family planning.

The actual style of painting differed from district to district—indeed in many cases from village to village—but in every case there was a firm reliance on certain basic principles. There was no attempt at literal description or meticulous portrayal. Shapes and figures were freely distorted. Sharp outlines and strong colours were used, or we can say in point of excellence of line and colour form these paintings are comparable with the famous paintings of the Ajanta caves and those of the Rajput Schools, but whereas the latter excel in refinement, these rural paintings of Bengal excel in the quality of

vigour and boldness of conception and style as well as in the strength and boldness of line and colour design and in their general dynamic quality.

In an article discussing the scroll paintings of village patua, G.S.Dutt pointed out that their chief qualities, *'freshness, simplicity, directness, robustness and power of vivid story telling'- were precisely those most valued in modern painting. 'From the point of view of conception as well as technique, it will be found that the basic characteristic of the art of patuas is the one which the Post-Impressionists of the West have been striving to attain, namely the elimination of all unessential and a dependence on fundamentals'*.<sup>8</sup>



**KALIGHAT PAINTING - CAT EATING A LOBSTER**  
Painting on Card-Paper - Water Colour

## **KALIGHAT PAINTINGS**

The Kalighat pats were not just the product of a particular era; they constituted the mirror of the times. The influence of the Kalighat pats has been quite considerable on modern Bengali art.

The development of painting as a medium of cultural expression became popular in Bengal in independence of the conventional art of temples and the influence of the royal court. The traditional and original paintings of Bengal, the 'pats', as they are popularly known were usually the representation of mythological stories and folklore in paint and paper. The pats derived their name from the ancient painter-story tellers, the 'patuas' who went story telling throughout Bengal using their paintings as illustrations to enable the listeners in the understanding of their stories.

Pat painting gained heights with the emergence of the Kalighat patuas in the scene during the 18th and 19th centuries. These painters came to Calcutta from the surrounding rural areas to earn a livelihood by trading their works of art. They began in a humble way by selling their pats to the numerous pilgrims who visited the famous Kalighat temple. Initially the Kalighat patuas concentrated only on religious subjects for the theme of their paintings. But

gradually the pats became an instrument of satire to mock the growing trend of the western culture.

The 'Kalighat pats' existed since 1820. The later inclusion of naturally coloured wood works and the colourful lithography depicting the then social life were inspired by the Kalighat pats. The 'patuas', 'patidars' or 'chitrakars' from Midnapur in rural Bengal, came and settled near the Kali temple on the banks of the Adi Ganga in Kolkata. Though they tried hard not to come under the European influence, they were only partially successful. Thus their pats went through transformations under the impact of the fast growing western urban culture.

As William Archer stated:

*The Bengali patua availed of the water colours then easily available in the city. They did not paint in the background, to save time and maybe to let the picture come out from the canvas.*

The Kalighat pats were generally composed on paper cut to the size of 7 inches by 11 inches, which was the size preferred by general buyers. Shading was used in the manner to emphasis the volume of the picture.

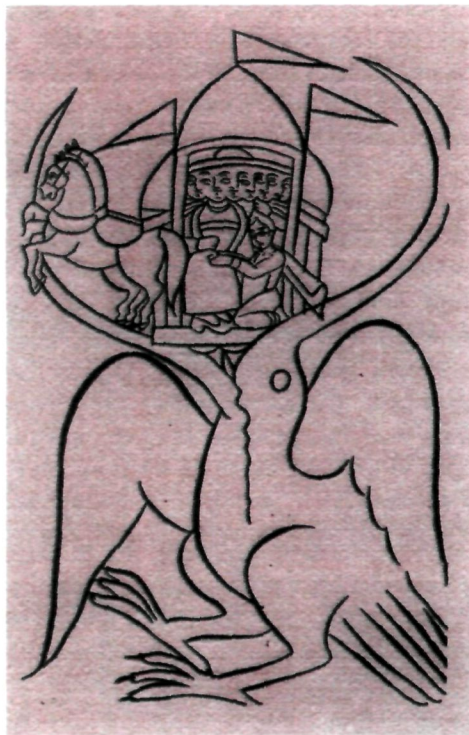




**THE TOILET**  
Kalighat pat on paper, Kolkata  
19<sup>th</sup> century



**CAT DEVOURING A FISH**  
Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal



**SCENE FROM THE  
RAMAYANA**  
Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal



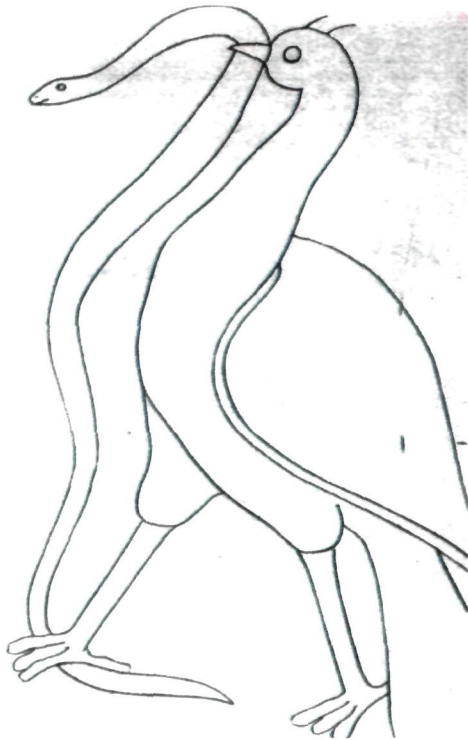
**WOMAN COOKING**  
Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal

Theology and mythology predominated the subject of the Kalighat pats. Various Gods and Goddesses are intricately designed and depicted. The pats also depict the social life of Bengal. Some paintings show illustrations of housewives and their various activities, like playing the 'veena', the 'behala' and the 'tabla' (Indian musical instruments), some protecting themselves with broom sticks, some taking care of the child, while others are seen engaged in dressing themselves up. Birds and animals were also sometimes included in the pats.

History too had its influence and provided the patuas with numerous subjects to work with. Figures like Rani of Jhansi, Lakshmibai, Shyamakanta fighting with a tiger, the great scandal of Tarakeshwar, a Bengali woman flying up in the sky in a balloon, or even the affair of Elokeshi and Mohanta, were some of the popular subjects. The elite society, the 'baboo's and the 'bibis', the dancing girls, the ladies of the town, and the loving couples, all added a touch of excitement and entertainment to the already colourful paintings.

The Kalighat pats were a sort of mirror to the society in which they were produced. These pats were of high significance to the social life of Bengal as they threw witty remarks with a touch of satire





**Snake caught by a peacock**  
**Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal**



**Woman belaboring an importunate  
 holy man**  
**Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal**



**CUCKOLDED HUSBAND SLAYS HIS  
 FAITHLESS WIFE**  
**Pat-drawing Kalighat Bengal**

through the medium of paint and paper. Thus the 'Bengali baboos' and the elite of the society did not particularly appreciate them, though they were a treat for the common people.

The significance of the Kalighat pats as works of art lies in the fact that the differences between them are remarkable. Moreover, the style of figuration, the division of flat unadorned pictorial space by rhythmic lines, the division of the same pictorial space into a mosaic of flat colour masses and many such artistic details add to the aesthetic nature of the pats.

Yet, the curious fact is that these drawings and paintings on rectangular sheets of untreated paper surface, done in ink and water-soluble opaque colours, were made as cheap souvenirs for selling these to the pilgrims to Kali temple at throw away prices. A coloured pat cost one 'anna' or one-sixteenth of a rupee in those days.

The Kalighat pats are the earliest examples of popular urban art. In spite of the fact that these pats could not stand to the onslaught of the more advanced lithography, oleography and much later the block bazaar pictures, it cannot be denied that they proved the

immense strength, the resilience and the adaptability of folk art tradition of Bengal.

Pat making is generally teamwork. The head patua begins with a pat and does the detailing. It is the job of the helpers to complete the work. Vegetable colours and water colours are used.

The present day pats are composed on art paper. Vegetable colours are used. Thin strips of cloth are pasted behind the paper after the completion of the painting. The brushes are made of goat hair.

The patua used primary colours like yellow, red and blue. Green and brown are also among the other colours used. Both vegetable colours as well as watercolours are used to paint the pats. The vegetable colours are extracted from various plants and spices.

Yellow Turmeric Red Catechu (extract from an Indian plant) and beetle leaf Green 'Hilinch' (Water cress) Purple 'Pui' (a creeper - the fruit or seed is crushed to get the colour) White 'Ghusum' (pond) soil Blue 'Nilmoni' fruit Brown 'Morum' soil Saffron Fire brick Black Burnt coconut shell soot

Due to the level of popularity to which the Kalighat pats rose, the patuas found it difficult to cope with the increasing demand. The extra pressure on the patuas made them turn to lithography to

enhance their productivity. In lithography the outline of the painting is printed in a faint impression and is then coloured.

The pats had a twofold beneficial nature. Apart from being great works of art they educated the people who bought them and on the other hand they provided for a livelihood to all those numerous patuas who were engaged in the making of them.

Writing in 1926 of the bazaar paintings of Kalighat, Ajit Ghosh claimed that

*They anticipated cubism and 'indeed much of the latest in modern art'.<sup>9</sup>*

The fluid lines of Kalighat work echo Indo-European influences. These paintings were done on paper and the scrolls with narrative format from the patua art were replaced by single paintings with stylised religious and urban themes. The Kalighat paintings were mainly rendered by painters from rural Bengal.

Celebrated painter Jamini Roy whose works are influenced by Kalighat pats expressed his views on 'Kalighat pats':

*"A wrong notion prevails about what is patua-art. Many a one is inclined to identify it with the Kalighat-pats. Not that there is no truth whatsoever in such an idea, but the truth has really a very slender basis. During the early days of the growth of Calcutta as a*

*city, a group of village craftsmen came to settle in Kalighat and went on with their paintings. They were essentially rustic artists; certain changes in their traditional work were, however, inevitable because of their contact with the urban life. They had to cater to urban taste and had for their market the fair in the city and the suburbs. So their work acquired an urban bias. It ceased to be strictly patua: the language remained largely rustic but the city life had entered into the theme.*"<sup>10</sup>

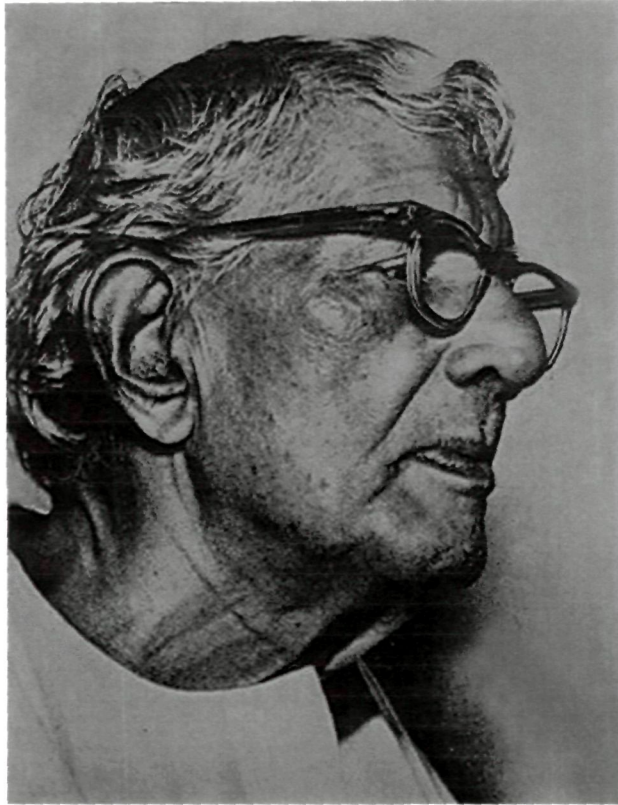
It is unfortunate that such craftsmanship that reached the heights of popularity gradually declined and finally lost its glory and is confined to the four walls of museums. The patuas returned to Midnapur from where they originated. But there are hopes that the pats may once again gain back the lost glory as the demands for them keep rising. Nowadays, most of the pat paintings are exported to foreign countries. But awareness among the Bengalis is on the rise. In 2002 Durga puja a pandal was decorated entirely with pat paintings.

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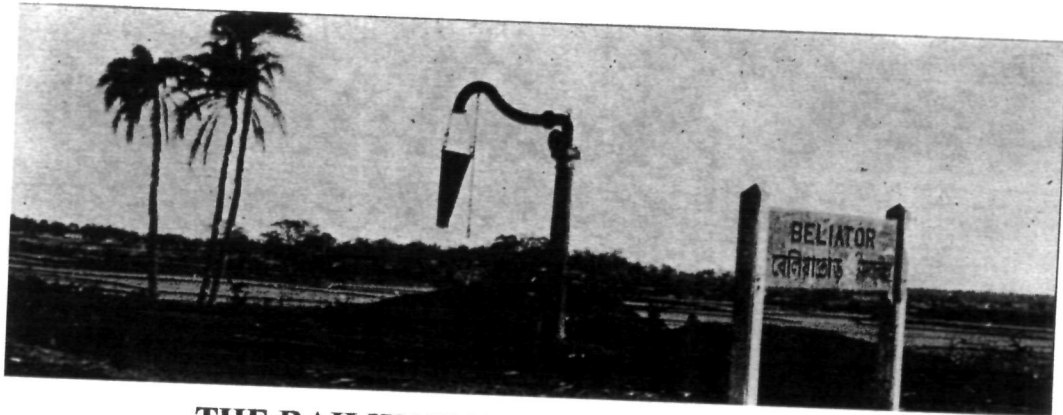
# CHAPTER – III

## JAMINI ROY



**11 April 1887 – 24 April 1972**

*The picture is what it is: Man creates it.  
And whatever man creates reflects his  
character, his daily life, his inmost  
thoughts, indeed everything.  
(translated from the original Bengali)*



**THE RAILWAY STATION, BELIATOR:  
JAMINI ROY'S VILLAGE**



**JAMINI ROY'S STUDIO AND RESIDENCE IN SOUTH  
KOLKATA 1950**



## HIS LIFE AND TIMES

Jamini Roy was born in April 1887 in a family of small landowners at Beliatare village in the Bankura district of West Bengal – an area well known for various forms of folk art and craft especially pottery and clay work. His father Ramataram Roy was an idealistic person and an amateur artist who, after resignation from government service, spent the rest of his life in his village amidst the potters. This environment accrued to Jamini Roy's artistic inclinations during his adolescence. From 1906 to 1914 he studied in European Academic Style at Calcutta Government Art School. There he learnt western art from the Italian artist-teacher Gilerdy and the oriental art techniques from its Principal Percy Brown.

A chronological evaluation of his time will lead to two divergent schools of thought in Indian Painting – both of them devoid of contemporary life styles. One was trying to revive ancient Indian glories, completely forgetting the present. The fragile works of Neo-Bengal school lacked the dynamism of life system. The subdued dreamy paintings, thin and weak forms were symbolical of the deteriorating state of art in India. On the other hand, the other group was using the Western clutches exhibiting European

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Everyone who comes to my house brings God into it.

— Jamini Roy quoted in *The Other Side of the Mountain* by Thomas Merton



**Ramtaran Roy, Jamini Roy's father**



**Nagendrabala, Jamini Roy's mother**

dominance and total submission of the Indian artists. These artists however were being patronised by the Government and by the Maharajas. They were painting for the sake of earning. Nothing tangible came out of these schools of thought. It was imperative for the young intellectuals to have a change. The search for intrinsic values of Indian art was badly needed. Jamini Roy responded to the need of his time. He learnt and abandoned the knowledge imparted through a school curriculum. He was in search of his own soul and tried to free art from the bondage of prevailing 'servocracy'.

After thirty years in the academic line, Jamini Roy returned to his native home, among the folk artists of Bankura district, a district which is soul-possessed. With the eye of an ancient man, for whom life is all embracing, he found in the patuas and potters a strength and form of their own, superb simplification, and colours in their purest, elementary state. With his urge for freedom and the desire to strike out his own path, he could never rest but continued his search till he could free himself from the academic clutches.

He came back to Kolkata and started to paint feverishly and passionately, "through work", he says, "a man moves towards the reality within himself".<sup>1</sup>

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On a visit to Kolkata Mahatma Gandhi once sent word to Jamini Roy to bring some paintings around for a private showing. The artist politely refused. "As a man", said Roy, "I will gladly go touch his feet with my hands. As an artist, never, it is his duty to come and visit me".  
Time CNN (Monday September 07, 1953)



**Four friends: (From L to R) standing Satish Sinha, Jogesh Seal, sitting Atul Bose and Jamini Roy, 1924**

He abandoned the formal elements of European Academic Style and devoted himself in creating pictures from simple indigenous forms but rendered in a modern setting and style. For this he adopted forms of folk dolls, child art and 'patas' of rural Bengal. For his paintings, Jamini Roy selected themes from joys and sorrows of everyday life of rural Bengal, religious theme like-Ramayana, Sri Chaitanya, Radha-Krishna and Jesus Christ, but he depicted them without narratives. Besides, he painted scenes from the lives of the aboriginal Santhals, as for instance 'Santhals engaged in drum-beating' 'Santhal Mother and Child' 'Dancing Santhals' etc. He rendered them symbolically through colours and hilarious rhythmic lines. The symphony of colourful palette and rhythmic lines created a new language of painting.

Like the master-artist Picasso, Jamini Roy's artistic career may be divided into different phases. In the primary stage he worked in European Post-Impressionistic style; in the next phase his works reflect the form of folk-dolls of the potters; in another phase he embraced the pata-painter's plasticity of lives. While creating these forms he deliberately avoided three-dimensionality and rendered in flat colour unhesitatingly the forms of 'Mother and Child' 'Radha-Krishna' 'Jesus Christ' without their thematic context.



ARTIST AT WORK

During the Second World War when American Army and officers bought exquisite paintings of Jamini Roy in higher price, his paintings became very popular among the connoisseurs and middle class people. Like the rural folk-painters and potters of Bengal, Jamini Roy used cheap indigenous pigments for his art to make them within the reach of the affluent as well as the poor. Like the pata-painters of Bengal he proposed his own paintings from indigenous materials like lampblack, chalk-powder, leaves and creepers. Even today, modern paintings of Jamini Roy, executed in the ideal of folk-pata paintings and dolls, attract the connoisseur's eyes as well as the teeming multitude.

Constantly searching for inspiration, Jamini Roy regards his paintings not as reproductions but as living expressions of a reality brought forth by controlled emotional experience. And it was a child who helped him achieve this. When an object did not respond to his liking, he asked a child to paint it. "Then", as he says, "I saw how to break it down", discovering the way to release vital force without freezing structure.

Roy considered himself to be an artisan, like the craftsmen who sold their wares at village fairs. He sold his paintings ridiculously cheap, according to their size. In his view an artist should use the

simplest materials at hand to create their works and should not wait for sophisticated or imported ingredients. To him paintings (like the works of the patuas) should be easily available and plentiful and not necessarily very unique. Thus an artist's home could be a workshop-studio producing paintings fairly inexpensively. Jamini Roy was convinced that this type of work was preferable to machine printed reproduction, because in the final analyses they were from the artist's own hand. Further he was of view that the artist should have rapport with his audience directly just as musicians or dancers do.

Jamini Roy lived a simple and ordinary life. His strong beliefs extended to his life. Not only did he not use an easel in his studio; there was not a stick of European style furniture in his home, where visitors (there was a constant stream of them, from many lands) were invited to sit on hand painted chowkies, or the polished red floor shiny as mirrors. He dressed in a white dhoti and a 'Bengali' all his life, condescending to put a chaddar on his shoulder when out visiting.

He took a deep interest in the theatre world of Kolkata which helped him realize the links between the reality and illusion. He also practiced sculpture and drawing and the later are noticeable for



their verve, rhythm and movement and the lines are conspicuously different from those in his paintings.

Roy held several one-man exhibitions and numerous group shows. The first Jamini Roy exhibition was held in 1929 at the premises of the Government School of Art, Kolkata. This was sponsored by Mukul Dey. In the foreword to the 1929 Jamini Roy exhibition catalogue Dey wrote:

*"The cultivation of fine arts has been a neglected subject and the artists are not usually given the prominence they deserve. Mr. Roy is an eminent artist in his own line. It must however, be said to his great credit that he succeeded in developing an indigenous line of art and preserving an outlook which is typically Bengali, from a state of decadence Mr. Roy's works shown at the present exhibition is an improvement upon the traditional art of Bengal and open up a new field of art altogether. He has established his place in the rank of artists as will be evident from the specimens of his works exhibited".<sup>2</sup>*

Critical appreciation of his works were published in several issues of 'Parichaya', a quarterly Journal of Calcutta, which made his paintings known to the public. Till then his works have been exhibited at several venues including the Burlington Gallery, London in 1946, New York in 1953 and the National Gallery of

Modern Art, New Delhi (in an exhibition titled ‘Centenary Exposition of Contemporary Art’). His works are in collections of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, beside being in several other renowned private and public collections. The Government of India awarded him the Padma Bhushan, a prestigious civilian award, in 1955. In his honour the Government of India issued a postal stamp featuring his painting “Two Vaishnavas” on 23.3.1978. (See colour plate 1).

In the long fifty years of his career as an artist Jamini Roy earned fame by evolving his own language of painting which he termed as ‘Flat Technique’. But due to the popularity of Bengal school of painting his contemporary artists hardly accepted his new technique and style.

He continued to paint in his chosen style till the end of his life. In the 1960s and 70s the stream of art widened to include new trends and new tendencies. However one of the major directions in modern Indian art is that of a return to the Indian heritage. The past as a source has been chosen from or interpreted variously according to the temperament or ability of the artist. Jamini Roy’s oeuvre was

perhaps pioneering in this respect. In his lifetime, he made a significant contribution to the art of his times. Though other artists of his time also referred to folk sources they did so comparatively briefly, and in a limited way. His art started a trend not only in the fine arts but also in illustration, design and applied art.

Jamini Roy died at the ripe old age of 85, in April 1972. But the artist's works and the ideals he stood for will continue to guide and inspire many for a long time to come.



**THESIS**

## **EARLY PHASE OF JAMINI'S ART**

When Jamini Roy was sixteen he was sent to study at the Government School of Art in Calcutta. He was taught to paint in the prevailing academic tradition, drawing classical nudes and painting in oils and in 1908 he received his Diploma in Fine Art

As a student, Roy used to survive by doing various jobs such as colouring wood block prints for broadsheets made by Battala print makers. He even had a stint in Allahabad as a stone re-toucher for a Litho-press. Finally after a few unsettled years he was back in Calcutta and free-lanced as a portrait painter.

His early paintings consist of the oil portraits, executed in the realistic manner imbibed from his art college days. At the start of his career, Jamini Roy adopted western style of painting and acquired much skill. During this period he became a professional painter and did experimental works in the manner of western Post-Impressionistic artists like Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin.

Jamini Roy's early works include landscapes in an impressionistic manner with an interest in space, texture and light. There is a strange stillness in the compositions, for the pictures do not contain any figures at all, even in the street scenes. The composition itself

is the end of the picture though it is embellished with surface textures in areas flecked with colour and light. The western source of this style is obvious. Although the paintings are competent they cannot be considered great or moving works of art. (See colour plates 2, 3 and 4).

Due to his great respect towards Abanindranath Tagore and his earnestness for Neo- Bengal School of painting. The early works of Jamini Roy do show signs of these influences. Jamini Roy, through his oil paintings, gave expression to the scenes of every-day life of the people of eternal rural Bengal. In both his oriental and occidental style of works his compositions reflect flat treatment of colour, bold lines and candour of folk art. In fact, the early days saw Jamini Roy go in many different directions. However, attraction to the Tagore styles was minimal unlike other students of his time.

Western influences however, did play a dominant part initially and Roy spent a lot of time on following the tenets of European 18th century art.

## **EVOLUTION OF FOLK MOTIFS IN HIS PAINTINGS**

Jamini Roy was born in a small village in the Bankura district of West Bengal. His childhood surroundings rich in folk culture, folklore and folk imagery, had a monumental influence on his art. Jamini joined the Government School of Arts in Kolkata, which provided him the discipline of a well-grounded formal training in fine arts. His curriculum there included studies in western academic art including portraiture and landscapes, impressionism, a study of the new Indian eclectic style.

After the academic training in the Kolkata School of Art in the early 1920s, some of his works bore residues of the Bengal School mannerisms. He made some brilliant forays into a Post-Impressionist genre of landscapes and portraits, yet Roy's early career was calamitous. He endured extreme poverty and his work was lack-lustre and banal. Disheartened, Roy began a wrenched journey to discover his own true style, undertaking odd jobs to survive. Finally after a few unsettled years he was back in Kolkata and free-lanced as a portrait painter.

It was not long before dissatisfaction set in and Roy also realized that portrait painting not only would set him apart from the hordes

of painters in Kolkata but also would not fulfil the creative urge in him. Also, during these years, Roy had been experimenting with gouache paintings in the line of Impressionist work. This too, left Roy feeling incomplete and dissatisfied and searching for an identity (See colour plate 5).

This yearning and denial of the European styles was perhaps the turning point in Jamini Roy's career. Seeking a visual vocabulary of his own, Jamini Roy moved away from traditional academic art and turned towards his roots. Several events led to his decision to turn to the indigenous roots.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Reverend James Long initiated the study of folklore by collecting native proverbs. Taraknath Mookherji made an ethnographic study of the Patua community and their vocation. By the turn of the century, Rabindranath Tagore published a collection of Bengali lullabies with his annotations. In the twenties, Abanindranath Tagore established the norms of research of folklore with his Magnum Opus *Banglar Brata*, the illustrated book on traditional Alpana.

Gurusaday Dutta, a member of the Indian Civil Service and a District Magistrate, traveled through Bengal in his attempt to revive

the rich folk traditions of Bengal. His collection formed the core of the famous Gurusaday Museum of Folk Art. Above all, a general nationalistic fervour prevailed over the country. It was at that time, in the mid twenties, that Gagendranath Tagore commissioned Jaminy Roy to copy a portrait of Devendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore. Gaganendranath was an art collector.

Earlier, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy had based his first two books on Indian art on his collection. The rich collection included specimen of Bengal folk art, – the Chauko Pat (square painting), the Jadu Pat (scroll), the Kalighat Pat, toys, the Kantha (embroidered quilt), besides Mughal and Rajput painting and other artifacts. In this collection, Jaminy Roy found an enchanting storehouse from which he could draw.<sup>3</sup>

His childhood memory of the doll-makers' art with its make-believe forms and patterns, its fancy designs and colours, was pursuing him all through his carrier, like a deep undercurrent.<sup>4</sup>

He spent his early childhood at his native village Beliatore, situated in the Bankura district and at the borders of Bengal and Bihar; the village is consisting of many tribal people – like Santhal, Barui and Mulla, who were living together. The district of Bankura is another



seat of traditional culture of Bengal. It not only occupies a prominent place in the socio-economic and political history of Bengal, but in respect of folk culture and hence in art, the district has special elements to offer. Apart from the rich terracotta art, the district seems to have inherited treasures of folk painting tradition as well. Jamini Roy grew up in the prevailing Folk-tribal art.

As we know the images don't fade out so easily, which are being collected in the childhood. This psychological reality was true in case of the boy named Jamini Ranjan. In his early years he had the privilege to watch the works of black-smith, carpenter, brass-smith, potter, weaver, rangsaz and the other craftsmen, who work with pat (jute fiber) and idol- makers from very close quarters. It was not confined upto mere watching or witnessing – but he used to copy their artistic work and thus he developed an emotional relation with the craftsmen. This background and the later development became the source-spirit of his work, especially the 'pat-chitra' of Kalighat. (See colour plate 6) "Cat and Lobster". It can be compared with Kalighat painting "Cat eating a Lobster".

From about the mid 1920's, when he was about 34 the artist started experimenting with folk art styles. Initially he drew a lot of inspiration from Kalighat Pat paintings as well as terracotta work

on temple walls of Bengal especially Bishnupur temple. His early pictures owed much to Kalighat pats (See colour plate 7) and his later work to hand-coloured dolls and toys and story telling painted scrolls. (See colour plates 8 and 9). He also showed his fascination for the paintings of peasant painters of Bengal who used to sell their work at the rural bazaars.

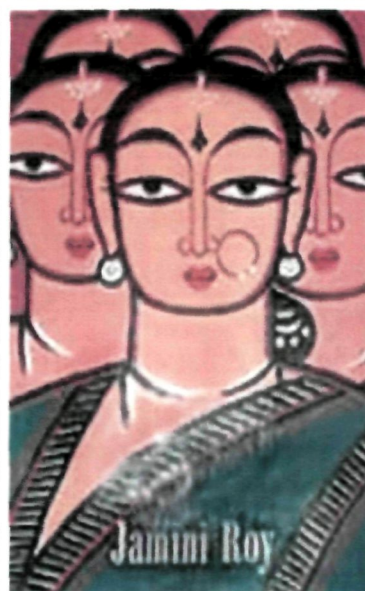
*From these folk-art influences on the one hand, and from his own self-conscious researches into formal simplification on the other, Jamini Roy gradually evolved the highly individual idiom of expression. He approached folk-art not as an outsider but as one who had an intimate knowledge and understanding of the living experiences of the people where lay the roots of the folk culture itself.<sup>5</sup>*

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# CHAPTER – IV

## FOLK ART OF JAMINI ROY



## **THEMES AND THEIR TREATMENT**

Jamini Roy hardly had any difficulty in his choice of themes. His subjects are taken from the people around him; the village folk in particular such as the Bauls, Bauris, Santhals or Mallas appear very often.

His choice of subjects was rich and exhaustive. In the early phase he painted many European subjects, landscapes and portraits. Later his subject matter was completely changed. He selected themes from joys and sorrows of everyday life of rural Bengal, the village cultivators, the carpenters, blacksmiths, Santhal men and women, fakirs and Vaishnava singers constituted the main subjects of his painting (See colour plates 10, 11, 12 and 13). Mythological characters are also usual – for instance, Krishna, Balaram, Shiva, Rama, and Gopinis (See colour plates 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18). His large panel like Krishna and Balaram was painted by the artist in his late 60s, a period of great creative activity. While the very dark – complexioned Krishna comes out blue in art, Balaram, the fairer of two brothers, may be depicted white, or a lighter colour. Usually one finds the two renowned brothers in the midst of adventure or

surrounded by symbolic references. They stand forth simply as presences, as if they had just been imagined for the first time.

Again from the world of animals, motifs such as cats, cows, horses and birds too make their frequent appearance (See colour plates 19, 20, 21 and 22). But, of all these, the artist has shown particular preference for the study of women, including mother and child, and Santhals.<sup>1</sup>

Jamini Roy never depicted any shrewd woman and seldom depicted violent scenes. Women find important place in paintings of Jamini Roy. Probably no other artist in India has delineated this theme with so much affection and gracefully as Jamini Roy did. His study of woman depicted her in motherly aspect, as villager and as devotee or sophisticated women. But, of these, he has shown particular attention to the manifestation of women as mother. Innumerable paintings and drawings were done by him to represent the different moods of mother. In 1935 Jamini Roy was awarded Viceroy's gold medal for his painting 'mother helping the child to cross a pool' (See colour plate 23). The scene is typically Bengali and the subject easily lends itself to sentimentality. But the ingenious use of clear-cut angular lines by the painter and his clean colours have given it a tenderness which expresses Bengal

more convincingly than the efforts at dim portraiture of the genre life of the province by the follower of the Bengali school.

Roy's rejection of the then modern style of painting and his foray into the realm of Bengali folk paintings marked a new beginning in the history of Indian modern art. His new style was both a reaction against the Bengal School and the Western tradition. The mother and child, Radha, and animals were painted in simple two-dimensional forms, with flat colour application and an emphasis on the lines. The main subjects were often enclosed within decorative borders with motifs in the background. The figure of the Christ was also a subject that Roy often painted.

He painted religious themes like – Ramayana, Sri Chatanya, Radha-Krishna and Jesus Christ, but he depicted them without narratives (See colour plates 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29). The Santhals, tribal people who live in the rural districts of Bengal, were an important subject for Roy.

In between 1921 and 1924 began his first period of experimentation with the Santhal dance as his starting point. He painted scenes from the lives of Santhals, as for instance 'Santhals engaged in drum beating' 'Santhal Mother and Child' 'Dancing Santhals' 'Santhal

wedding' etc. His was a new language of painting combining the symphony of colourful palette and rhythmic lines (See colour plates 30 and 31).

According to some critics it is the Santhal theme, which undergoes a change and gets a fresh extension in the artist's works depicting Christian themes. Though the artist was not familiar with the Biblical stories, his depiction of Christ has undoubtedly acquired an altogether fresh meaning. At once sublime and tender, in these works one comes across an unusual combination of the human and the divine. He wanted to show that the human and divine could be made only by abstract, symbolic means. In particular, one can find a close parallel between Jamini Roy's Christ studies and the anonymous French folk-painters of the 12<sup>th</sup> century whom Gauguin copied<sup>2</sup> (See colour plates 32, 33, 34 and 35).

Speaking in 1943, he told Mary Milford:

*"This is my latest period. I am not a Christian. I do not read the New Testament or any other writing but I meditate on what I have heard or what I know. There have been few, if any, satisfactory paintings of Christ for expression of the significance of his life. This is a great theme and I shall continue to struggle to find a fitting expression in modern terms."*



The style he adopted had, at first sight, certain affinities with Byzantine painting. Christ was obviously regarded by him not as divine but rather as a person whose indifference to suffering, courage in the face of torment, simplicity, honesty and poverty exemplified the same virtues as those of Santhals.<sup>3</sup>

Well-known are his paintings of 'Christ and Disciples', 'The Last Supper', 'The Flight to Egypt', 'Annunciation'. There is no denying, however that the themes are in a way limited and the artist has often been found to repeat himself.<sup>4</sup>

He made copies of his own work as he followed the patua tradition where works of art were not necessarily unique and favoured the making of art the outcome of a collective effort.

## **STYLE AND TECHNIQUE**

Jamini Roy was a versatile artist. He was no worshiper at any shrine of art, imitator of any school or style, he painted in any a manner he liked, in any style he wanted and in any medium. He handled oils and water colours as boldly and freely as he handled tempera.<sup>5</sup> He was trained in the art school and was able to live by working in a currently accepted style, he felt compelled to change his style again and again. He was pursued by a restlessness until he reached a style which was his own, a style which was 'new' and versatile, which allowed him scope for innovation and at the same time was not untraditional.

In his search for form, colour and technique, he watched tirelessly for hours the potter on the wheel, a Patua painting a scroll or the village ladies painting a ritual motif with indigenous colours applied by the finger tips or at best by cotton covered reed brushes resolving figures to their basic elements – the head, torso and the limbs. Head became the most dominant feature, which was mobilised by a single element – THE EYE – the rest, i.e. the nose, lips, ears and even hair became secondary. This concept influenced him tremendously, so much so that in most of his works 'the eye' is

the key to his thought – sometimes extending beyond the head and enveloping the entire canvas. At times he adopted folk toys as they were; as is evident in now so famous ‘Bankura Horse’. The Bankura is a common sight in many homes as a decoration piece. It has a long straight giraffe like neck, a barrel shaped body and a disproportionately short tail. It impressed him so much so that he painted it as it was – practically like a drawing, needing no more accentuation or improvisation.<sup>6</sup> e.g. ‘Red Horse’ (See colour plate 36).

Jamini Roy’s early work shows his versatility and that in fact he was an artist in search of a style. Besides portraiture, a genre at which he was quite skilled, he did landscapes in an impressionistic manner with an interest in space, texture and light. There is a strange stillness in the compositions, for the pictures do not contain any figures at all even in the street scenes. The composition itself is the end of the picture though it is embellished with surface textures in areas flecked with colour and light. The western source of this style is obvious. Although the paintings are competent they can not be considered great or moving works of art.

Another medium of expression which he practiced was paintings reminiscent of the Bengal school, these paintings were very close to

the Bengal school in manner and painted sometimes in water colours and at others in oil, though in appearance they simulate paintings in 'wash'. The compositions which are large in size consists of a single figure of woman. The treatment and colour are lyrical and harmonious, reminiscent of the gentle romantic colour schemes of Abanindranath and his followers. (See colour plate 37). But the style failed to evoke any genuine interest in him. So the only course left open was to evolve something in his own way. It was only when he was about 34 years of age that the artist discovered his true inspiration and set about evolving his characteristic style.

Jaminy Roy chose his motifs from folk sources; it was from rural toys, pats and terracottas that he selected his rhythmic lines and decorations. Some of the characteristic that have been specifically identified as being part of a folk spectrum that influenced Jamini Roy like the use of microdots around the contour, or the springing of the picture surface with coloured dots are not only peculiar to this tradition but are a part of the world folk tradition. The space-filling units of dots and tiny flowers in white had been borrowed from the Ganaki type Lakshmi Sara, – the round shaped earthen platter painted with the images of the Goddess. The Patuas of the

Ganaki Sara use similar units in white to decorate the flat Indian Red background. In his scheme of decoration, Jamini Roy combined external elements from different traditions, which a traditional Patua would never do. He used a broader colour range for creating a colour orchestration as against the codified palette of the traditional Patua.

Jamini Roy chose these idioms as an artist and for picture making; he had found the elements of a language, which he proceeded to make his own by expressing himself through it. He did not wish to bridge a gulf and bring the fine arts and handicrafts closer together as some critics have suggested. Rather he went to a familiar source, which was at hand and from it originated a style. His early pictures owed much to Kalighat pats and his later work to hand-coloured dolls and toys and the story telling painted scrolls. His style in this form of expression goes through many changes.

In the first phase he uses little colour, but creates simple forms related to those of Kalighat painting though more elegant and drawn with the same sweeping brush lines. The single figures of women continued to be the motif was stylised and filled the entire area of the picture (See colour plate 38). There was no space for any environment, details and accessories if any were very limited.

His new heroines were not realistic, they were forms, elegant and perhaps even modern, wrapped in the sweeping sheath of a saree whose borders and folds constituted the main lines. The features were also simplified and stylised especially the large eyes. The paintings of this type are motif – centered and this quality continued into his later art. Whether describing a woman, a cat or a fish the contours enclosed a clearly felt form; the form was a design, a flattened shape filling a frame. These pictures are decorative but pleasing because of the rhythm of the brush lines; the lines are rather even, there is no attempt at plasticity, again details and highlights like jewellery are quite minimal. However the figures are connected to reality in spite of their stark stylization.

In the second phase the style attains a certain maturity and the artist uses a bright palette. An increased influence of folk toys, painted scrolls, terracottas etc. is seen on his work. The colours are always opaque and flat and enclosed within strong black lines. Dots and decoration in black, vermilion or white finish the picture. The enclosure of the bright spaces in thick black lines gives the colour areas an added luminosity like that of stained glass. The compositions are more complex: often figures are only partially depicted, groups of heads, two sitting figures arranged

symmetrically on either side of a tree, the curved form of a dancer and other compositions are characteristic. There is frequent repetition of motifs and decorative elements. The subjects of these paintings may be from the myths and legends, Krishna Lila, Ramayana etc. (See colour plates 39 and 40) or from rural life, very often the life of the Santhals. The figures seem at once flattened and tightly pressed into the composition, there is no depth and little surface space, the whole arrangement is highly stylised and decorative, and its meaning is in its pattern. The artist assumes some of the primitive features of folk art such as the large head, large eyes, frontal aspect and so on. His sketches show that the basis of his art is in the creation of motifs – a principal element in decorative design. The stylisation and rhythm are related to those taken by the folk models.

In the third phase the artist is more free and spontaneous with his motifs. The compositions are less tightly organised. There is a fair amount of surrounding space, sometimes with borders. The colours of the pictures are more subtle and the decorative treatment more disciplined. Sometimes the artist returns to his linear treatment in coloured lines but the lines here are used rhythmically to create both forms and texture. A good example is his composition based

on a terracotta, bird mother. Other compositions of interest are those devoted to Christian themes, riders on animals, elephants, lobsters, cat, fish etc. (See colour plates 41 and 42). The animals are mostly used singly in a space, which is sometimes enclosed with borders. However, the artist is deeply indebted to the folk conception, the cat or horse is not concerned with the semblance of the real animal; it is an archaic convention, a symbol evolved by the folk imagination (See Colour plate 43).

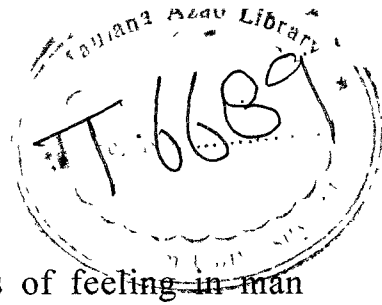
As is only to be expected, the new phase was marked with changes in techniques and methods. The artist changed from oil to earth colours. In place of canvas he used clay or lime coated cloth or paper and wooden boards. He tried egg tempera as a binding medium but more often used tamarind seed glue. He reduced his palette to seven colours – Indian red, Yellow ochre, Cadmium green, Vermilion, Grey and Blue and white – mostly prepared out of easily available materials like hingul, harital, chalk khori, lamp black, girimati, chalk or lime-stone. But inspite of these limitations we find his pictures bright.

The inspiration for painting on woven mats was the textures he had seen in colour photographs. It occurred to him that painting on a



woven mat might make for an interesting mosaic-like surface (See colour plate 44).

Jamini Roy's paintings are known for its simplicity as well as the symbolic quantity and purity. He fused the minimal brush strokes of the Kalighat style with elements of tribal art from Bengal (like that of the terracotta work found in the Bishnupur temple in Bengal, where terracotta was often composed into decorative units – some elaborate in design – over portals and across exterior walls of the temples).



## **WOMEN IN JAMINI'S PAINTINGS**

The rationale of thought and the sensuousness of feeling in man towards the other sex the world over and the known history of humanity have inspired him to portray her in various forms and moods, poses and postures. The media may be stone, metal, terracotta or any other form fit for human expression. The given history of mankind is replete with man's creation of his own mother, beloved, sister, daughter and others.

India has a rich tradition of paintings, ranging from primitive cave paintings and tribal art work to the magnificent creations of master craftsmen who enjoyed royal patronage to paintings by contemporary artists. Over the centuries, the medium of painting, the material, style and themes have modified. What has remained consistent, however, is the Indian artist's fascination with the female form.

Some of the earliest women paintings of India are the female forms that adorn the walls of the Ajanta caves. The women in these paintings are depicted as beautifully graceful, with perfectly proportionate figures. They are portrayed in various poses. The artists of the time were inclined to depict Indian women as

embodiments of fertility, and these figures too were painted accordingly. They were voluptuous and full-bodied.

In medieval times as well, women paintings of India depicted the female as well-endowed. This characteristic portrayal of women is apparent in the numerous styles of painting of that time, including Rajasthani Miniatures and Radha Krishna Paintings. Women were represented mainly as lovers and consorts. They were rarely, if not ever, seen as independent figures. An occasional depiction of Meera Bai (A Bhakti Cult Poetess) would deviate from this norm to a certain extent, but such depictions were not very common.

Raja Ravi Verma single handedly revolutionized the way artists portrayed women in India. His female figures are proportionate and life like. They are closer to the western realistic schools of art than the indigenous schools. It is not surprising then that he found admirers in the western art circles.

In all his portrayals of Indian women, irrespective of the social strata or occupational status they occupied, Verma depicts them as objects say that this was perhaps natural, considering his women were usually mythological figures. Critics have found his depictions problematic, nonetheless. They have ruthlessly criticized

his perennial preference for fair skin, and his stereotypical depiction of them as dependents. However it cannot be denied that he transformed the aristocratic upper class women of his times into his heroines by combining the sacred and the seductive:

Jamini Roy has shown particular preference for the study of women, including mother and child, and Santhals. Women find important place in paintings of Jamini Roy. Probably no other artist in India has delineated this theme with so much affection and gracefully as Jamini Roy did. He is celebrated for his quaint depiction of the women of Bengal. The women paintings of India by this artist are preoccupied with the peasant women in her simple yet colorful surroundings. Roy portrays her as an embodiment of Indian womanhood and strength.

His study of woman depicted her in motherly aspect, as villager and as devotee or sophisticated women. But, of these, he has shown particular attention to the manifestation of women as mother. Innumerable paintings and drawings were done by him to represent the different moods of mother (See colour plate 45). In 1935 Jamini Roy was awarded Viceroy's gold medal for his painting 'mother helping the child to cross a pool'.

Santhal woman was another favorite theme of Jamini Roy. As we have seen from the poems of Rabindranath, the Santhals were notable for their simple honesty, innocent bearing and courage in the face of hardship.

Another sensitive Bengali, Sudhin N. Ghose writing about Santals in his novel 'Cradle of the Clouds'

*"I was genuinely fond of them. I was enamoured of their broad-hipped and ample-bosomed matrons clad in blue saris with vermilion and saffron hems. Those wearing red oleanders and yellow poppies in their jet-black hair were for me sylvan goddesses. Their movements were so graceful, their laughter so infectious and their glances so haunting. The dreams of my wakeful hours were peopled by them. I simply adored the Santhal women and all that went with them: the water jars shaped like amphora, their heavy bangles fitted with tiny berry –like bells, their coral necklets and floral necklaces, and in particular, their bouncing babies with big eyes filled with water. It was a pleasure to watch them carried astride their mother's backs or straddled across their father's shoulders."*

All these things may have impressed him so deeply that he has done a number of paintings regarding Santhal women. As Santhal mother and child, Santhal women, head of Santhal etc. (See colour plates 46 and 47) In an early study painted in 1935, a Santhal girl is

shown arranging her hair, in this painting an air of simple grandeur is evoked by bounding lines reinforced by rich and sombre colours. There is a free surrender to the sweeping dip in her back and the springing curves of her large magnificent body (See colour plate 48).

Jamini Roy never depicted any shrewd woman and seldom depicted violent scenes. His women figures-Radhas, Gopinis, Pujarins and mothers and child-provide us with a new brand of reified feminine icons (See colour plate 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55). It lay in the logic of Jamini Roy's great success that his art came to suffer something of the same fate that had attended the art of his predecessors, Ravi Verma or Abanindranath Tagore.

## CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Jamini Roy is categorised differently by different people – from folk artist to contemporary to rebel artist – was unique in himself and was one of the prime movers of the contemporary art movement in India. The exposition of Jamini Roy's works was first held in British India Street, Kolkata, in 1938. Critical appreciation of his works were published in several issues of 'Parichaya', a quarterly Journal of Kolkata, which made his paintings known to the public. Till then many critics of India and abroad have given their views about his art. Some of them are given below:

According to Stella Kramrisch :

*"His work is built on solid ground, open and without pretence; it is based on universals of form which are understood by all who know art, whether from the East or the West... Like the 'Pali', the wooden grain- measure used in this country, pure in form and perfect in subdued symbolic design, the art of Jamini Roy serves the living Bengal."*<sup>7</sup>

Rolf Italiaander remarked that, *"Jamini Roy's art was deeply rooted to the folk art traditions of Bengal."*

Beverly Nicholas in his verdict on India, remarked that, *"Jamini Roy was the greatest living artist of India,"*

Mulk Raj Anand subscribed to the view that, *“Jamini Roy had suddenly decided to cut himself adrift from the urbane style of art and went back to the folk art of his village.”*

It was Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who had remarked in 1945 that, *“Jamini Roy was not a folk painter; in his case, the primitivism came via Europe”*.

Ashok Mitra had observed that, *“he had remodeled the folk elements within the framework of his knowledge in European art”*.<sup>8</sup>

Shahid Suhrawardy, the then Rani Bageswari Professor of Indian Art at the Calcutta University, was the first to hail Jamini Roy as an artist of significance and to call attention to the quality of “timelessness” in his works. He remarked in “The Art of Jamini Roy” that,

*“Jamini Roy’s inspiration was wholly Indian; the indefinable Impressionism was not his cup of tea, and, that is why he abandoned the pseudo-Japanese Impressionism of Bengal school”*.<sup>9</sup>

John Irwin in “Jamini Roy and the Indian tradition” suggests that this artist returned to the village style because he was *“convinced of the failure of the Bengal School.”* And he felt within him the



urge to discover the formal values of painting and *"close the rift between academic and indigenous art."*

Irwin goes on to say, *"From these folk art influences on one hand and from his own self-conscious researches into formal simplification, Jamini Roy gradually evolved the high individual idiom of expression that we find in his later paintings. In his case there was no question of revivalism. The important point to recognize is that he approached folk-art not as an outsider, but as one who had an intimate knowledge and understanding of the living experiences of the people where lay the roots of folk-culture itself".*<sup>10</sup>

Another author, Bishnu Dey suggests that *"Jamini Roy and Rabindra Nath Tagore 'liberated' the younger artists"*.<sup>11</sup>

A well known French art critic A. Herve Masson had observed that, *"the art of Jamini Roy does not limit itself only to the face of India: it has sometimes searched inspiration on the side of the Occident. It results then in strange portraits of Christ whose resemblance with those painted in Byzantium is astonishing"*

He further pointed that, *"Outside India, Jamini Roy is certainly to be counted among the greatest contemporary masters"*.<sup>12</sup>

According to Jaya Appasamy:

*"The general effect of Jamini Roy's compositions is highly decorative and pleasing. In adopting such a stylised manner the artist tends to loose some of the qualities of high art, such as*

*suggestion and emotional quality. His pictures are no doubt handsome and easily intelligible since they do not seek any other aim than to be attractive visually. In this they are related to beautiful crafts as well as to abstract compositions.*”<sup>13</sup>

Bishnu Dey and John Irwin in their joint monograph on Jamini Roy, published by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, felt that the basic form of Bengal folk art helped Jamini Roy to evolve his personal idiom and to solve his problems as a painter.

From these viewpoints we can say that in his artistic sojourn he moved from the reality expressed by the quality of appearance to the beauty expressed by the quality of line and colour. The Bengal folk paradigm fitted in with his quest for evolving his personal style. In order to postulate his own view of art against the much practiced art trends of his times, he drew liberally from the Bengal folk traditions and from other traditions as well. As a painter, he showed the penchant for the harmony, formal balance and symmetry that are of utmost importance to an artist working in modern idiom. In his endeavour, we find him engrossed in purely formalistic problems which Jamini Roy, as a modern painter was actually exploring.

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13. Jaya Appasamy, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.15 and 16, 1973, p.45.

# CHAPTER – V

## CONCLUSION



Jamini Roy was one of the most famous painters of late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. The art of Jamini Roy was a milestone in contemporary Indian Art. Not only did it break away from the notion that art was the sole preserve of the upper classes and had to necessarily follow European styles but it also brought to fore the folk art language. Introduction of bold yet simple and minimal use of lines also brought in the new wave of reducing images to the bare essentials and yet tells the story emphatically.

Jamini Roy - categorized differently by different people - from folk artist to contemporary to rebel artist - was unique in himself and was one of the prime movers of the contemporary art movement in India. Jamini Roy - one of the fathers of Modern Indian Art.

Like Picasso, Jamini Roy is probably one of the most immediately recognizable artists in the history of Indian art. Even though one thinks that one has not seen his work, at least to those who have spent time in India, upon seeing an example, one instantly realizes having seen one somewhere, in someone's house. The example of Picasso is telling in several ways, not the least of which is the extent to which Jamini Roy influenced and reshaped the course of modern Indian art.

In my opinion he can be well regarded as a 'colourist' because his colours had a luminous quality. He had used pure and opaque colours, juxtaposed to impart character to his paintings. The colour scheme is predominantly that of contrast, blues against reds, yellow against black – emitting male handsomeness- bold and structural. Although Jamini Roy had used warm colours yet the effect was cool and pleasing, amusing and charming, like a well-built structure. Jamini Roy used yellow and white to infuse light in his painting. Rejecting canvas and oil, he laid his strikingly bright direct colors on paper, sometimes on palm leaf mats. The result was an astonishing new beauty.

He never lost the mission of his life once perceived and he painted most of his paintings with the basic trends and tenets of folk art, i.e. simplicity rhythm, mythical and cultural themes. But he did not follow the traditional colour schemes of folk art. For example, in our country, the use of black and blue were not permitted in the auspicious ceremonies, but he refused to accept this grammar. He obviously and in abundance used the blue brown and grey colours in his colour scheme. By doing so his works became more brilliant and attractive in their effect. . Furthermore, the lines became more confident, rhythmic and dynamic. Rai Krishna Das, a well-known

critic, mentioned in his book, 'Bharat ki Chitrakala': "the artist Jamini Roy inherits the same directness and the forces – which are the moving spirit of the primitive art."

Jamini Roy experimented with local materials, like board, mats and cloth coated with binding substances. His palette switched to Indian colors derived from local materials, and made up the traditional way. In this way he turned his back on the expensive oils and materials of the academic style. His purpose was to find an Indian expression of themes, not only in the choice of subject but also in method of composition.

Jamini Roy started this change using the motif of the Santhal tribesman and women and they are amongst his most immediately appealing works to any collector of Indian art. Far removed from the western academic style or the Bengal revivalist style looking back to Indian miniatures, Roy focused on the everyday man and woman, a subject not treated before in Indian art. In many ways, like Ravi Varma, but coming from a different perspective. Roy wanted to make art accessible to the common man and not just the affluent and chosen few.

His style apparently harked to the traditions of the Patuas for the reason that he derived models from their crafts and made use of



abbreviation. But he did so with a clear formalistic notion. He never adhered to the format orientation and other rules and restrictions the Patuas religiously follow and from which they refuse to deviate. Even while copying a traditional pat, Jamini Roy showed his urbane approach and made it clear that he could remodel and restructure any tradition for working out his style.

With this notion, he made copies of the Kalighat Pats. The copies were hardly identical despite the use of the same models. He could freely replace the traditional use and character of line and colour to suit his own purpose which a traditional Patua would never have dared to do. The Kalighat Patua showed and accentuated concern with his bold contour line – hard outsides and tonal insides – created in a single sweeping stroke. The line had a magical quality suggesting both contour and volume, and hardly betrayed moments of indecision. Jamini Roy in his copy replaced the Kalighat line. He drew a flat outer line in a dark colour and an adjacent line in a subsidiary colour. He repeated this double-line technique in successive paintings. The quality of the double-line appears calculated and mechanical against the spontaneity of the Kalighat line. He consciously transformed the line of force, volume and tactile feeling into one of decoration to suit his purpose. One thing

he wanted to do away with was with the imitation of nature, as did the European moderns, and in this pursuit he flattened his form by replacing the Kalighat line with his flat double-line. The abbreviated nature of form, the gesture of line, the use of colour for the sake of colour, the total compositional clarity and the frontal placement of the form without illusionistic depth, were the qualities he made use of for evolving his style. With this formalistic notion he copied the Kalighat Pats.

Therefore to dub his paintings as an offshoot of folk art would be a mistake. He dipped in that primal, collective reservoir of form and colour which defy time and space. Due to the inherent richness and vital quality of his art, both in form and content some critics have compared to Cezanne in the plastic strength of his paintings; to van Gogh in his vision and depth; to Picasso in his line effects; to Derain in his general appeal and with Monet in colour feeling.

For Jamini Roy painting was not only a means of depicting figures for some practical purpose but a progress towards the non-representational and the objective. He evolved formally organized patterns of primary colours and pure lines. These are characteristically bold and decorative with the overwhelming inner reality of a man who has a basic awareness of spiritual values. In

this experiment he has developed abstract symbols, resulting in a form of contemporary expression which is modern in manner but profoundly Indian in feeling. This characteristic is most marked in his earlier popular iconographical compositions, particularly the Gopini figures whose forms have all the studied aloofness of the classical approach, distinct from his later experiments, such as with Christian icons.

Jamini Roy gave a novel and daring direction to the art of colonial India by evolving his idiom of expression out of Bengal's folk painting. His search was towards the cultural and ethnic identity as an Indian artist, particularly as a Bengali.

He was craving for that sense of belonging to a cultural tradition which is traced in the life and culture of the people. He successfully bridged the gap that developed in the cultures of the traditional rural Bengal and the colonial Kolkata. It was Jamini Roy who provided a broader base to the art of modern India by enriching it with ethnic substances.

Luckily for us, there are many Jamini Roy works still available and they are an essential part of any collection of contemporary Indian art. His influence on younger artists in style and subject matter was tremendous, and in many ways, the conflicts of influence that

concerned him are still of concern to contemporary artists as they try to find their own voices.

The similarities of the basic structure and other relevant elements like themes, colours or lines etc. of the work of Jamini Roy may be noticed in the works of some modern Indian artists and here we can mention the names of several artists, for example, Asit Haldar, Ramen Chakravarty, Mukul Dey, Hebbbar, Sailoz Mukherji, K.Rajiah Almelkar, K.Srinivasulu, Sunil Madhav Sen, Badri Narayan and Sheila Auden etc.

So the importance of art of Jamini Roy is not merely because it is more or less impressed by Indian folk art but it has opted out the new principles of modern art and has evolved a new direction. The artists works and the ideals he stood for will continue to guide and inspire many for a long time to come.

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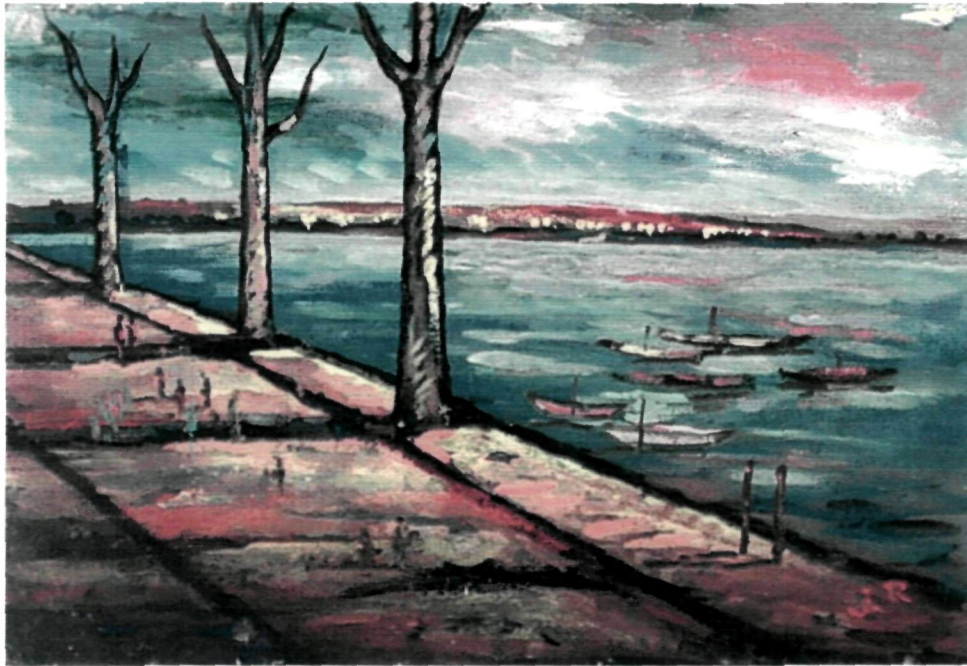
# COLOUR PLATES



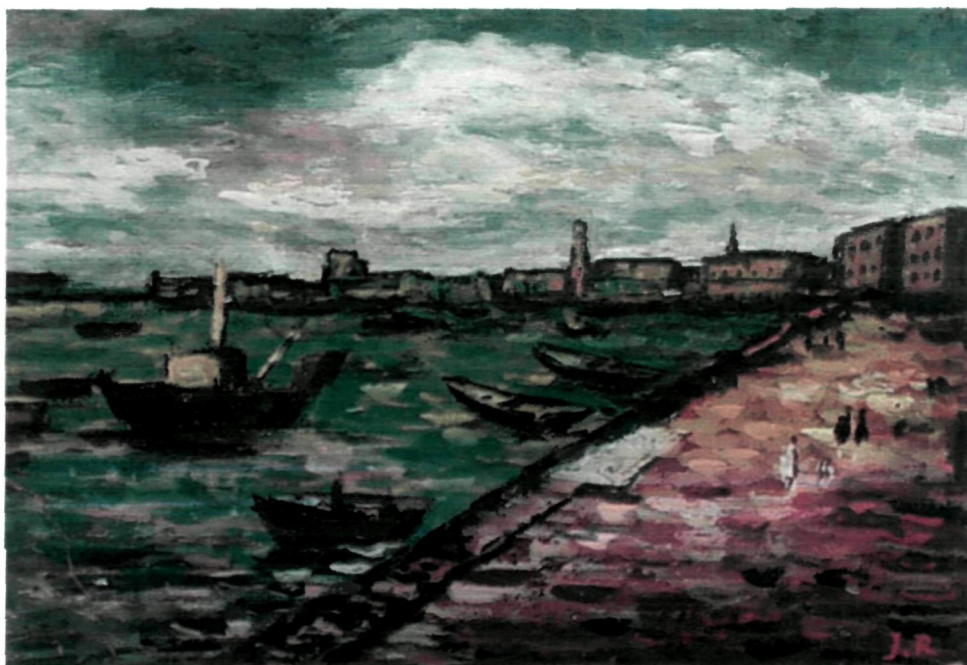


**COLOUR PLATE – 1**  
**TWO VAISHANAVAS**  
*A Stamp of India Featuring a Jamini Roy's Painting.*





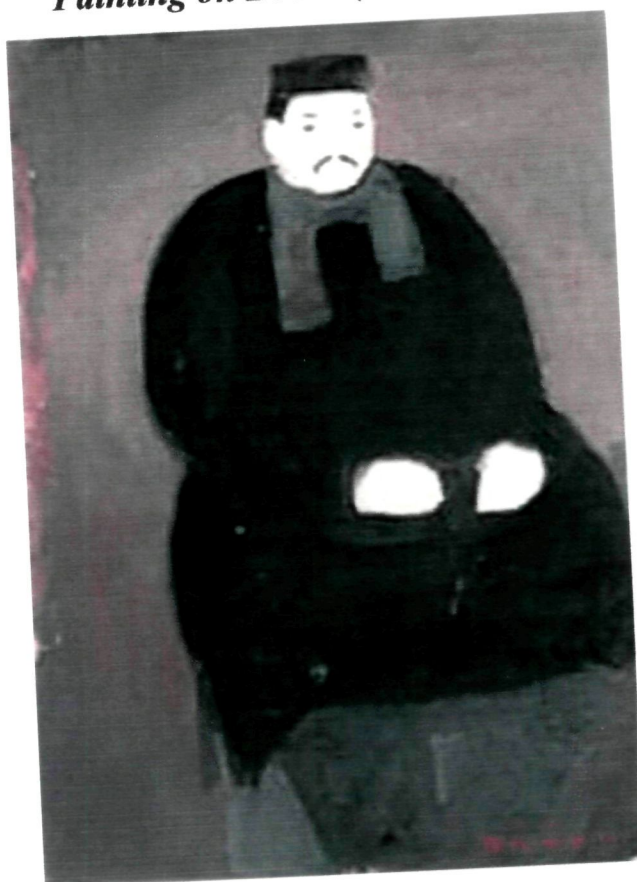
**COLOUR PLATE – 2**  
**IMPRESSIONIST LANDSCAPE**  
*Painting on Board (14"× 18")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 3**  
**SEASCAPE (impressionist style)**  
*Painting on Board (15.5"× 19")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 4**  
**LANDSCAPE (impressionist style)**  
*Painting on Board (14"× 12.5")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 5**  
**JUDGE**  
*Gouache on Card*  
*(13.5"× 8.1")*

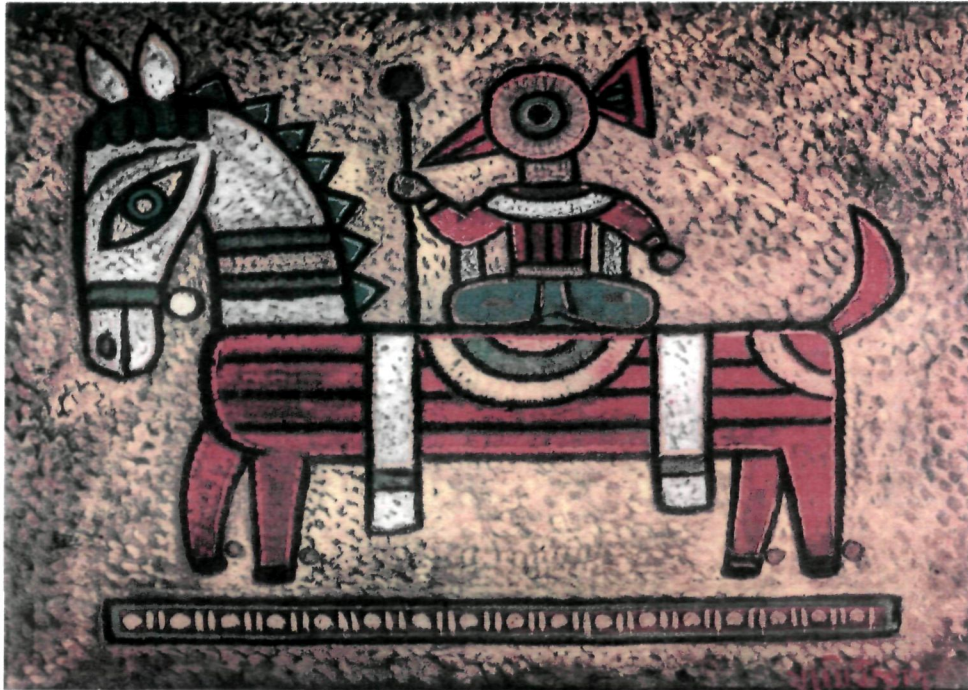




**COLOUR PLATE – 6**  
**CAT AND LOBSTER**  
*Tempera on paper (39.7× 27.5 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 7**  
**WOMAN**

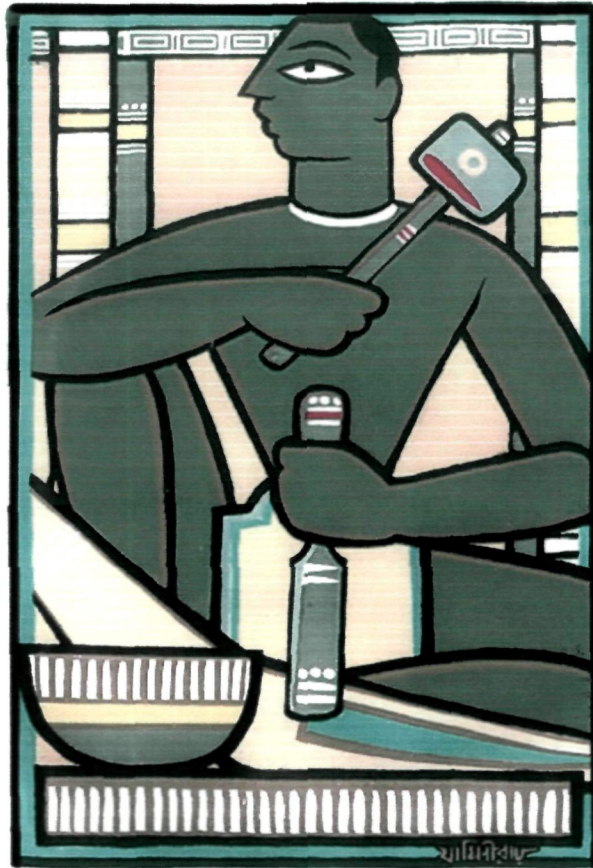


**COLOUR PLATE – 8**  
**GARUDA ON HORSE BACK**



**COLOUR PLATE – 9**  
**THREE WOMEN**

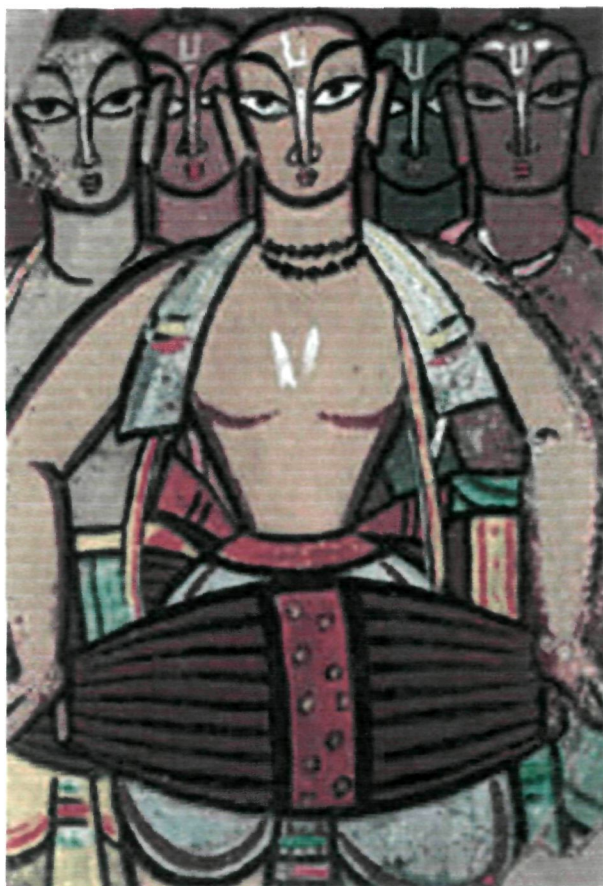




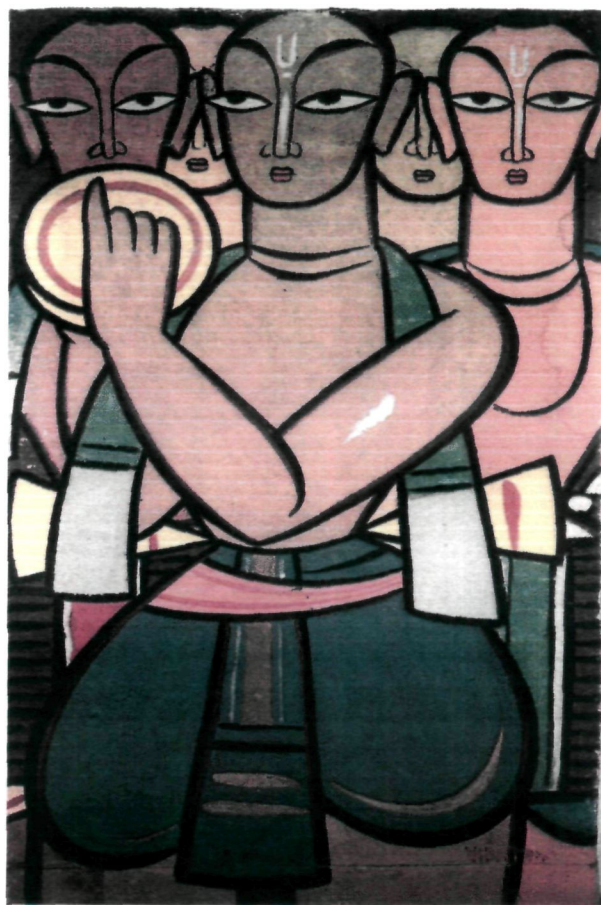
**COLOUR PLATE – 10**  
**BLACKSMITH**  
*Tempera on Card Paper*



**COLOUR PLATE – 11**  
**TWO WOMEN**  
*Gauache on paper (11.25"×15")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 12**  
**DRUMMER**  
*Gouache on Card*



**COLOUR PLATE – 13**  
**KIRTAN**





**COLOUR PLATE – 14**  
**KRISHNA AND BALRAM**  
*Tempera on canvas (148×87 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 15**  
**SHIV, PARVATI & GANESH**  
*Painting on Board (15"×15")*







**COLOUR PLATE – 18**  
**GOPINI (Mosaic Style)**  
*Painting on Board (14"×12.5")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 19**  
**KITTEN HOLDING A FISH**



**COLOUR PLATE – 22**  
**BIRD**  
*Tempera on Paper (19×24 cm)*

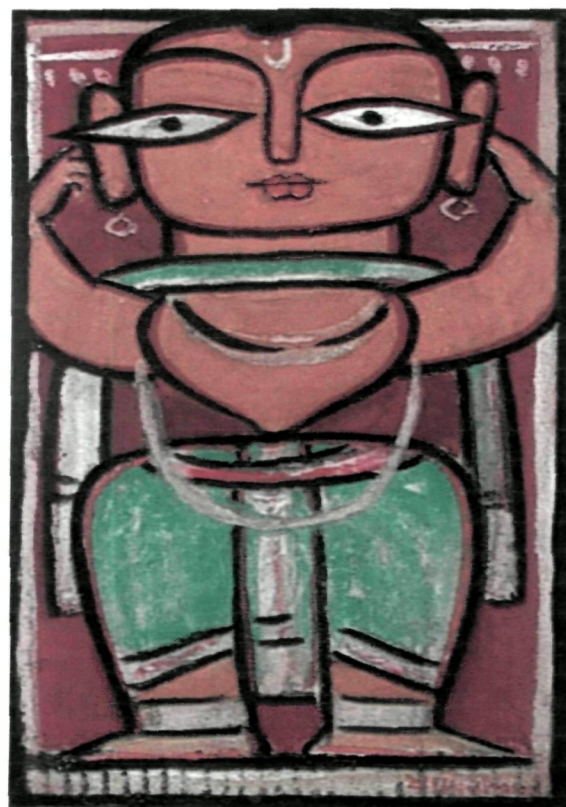


**COLOUR PLATE – 23**  
**MOTHER HELPING THE**  
**CHILD TO CROSS A POOL**





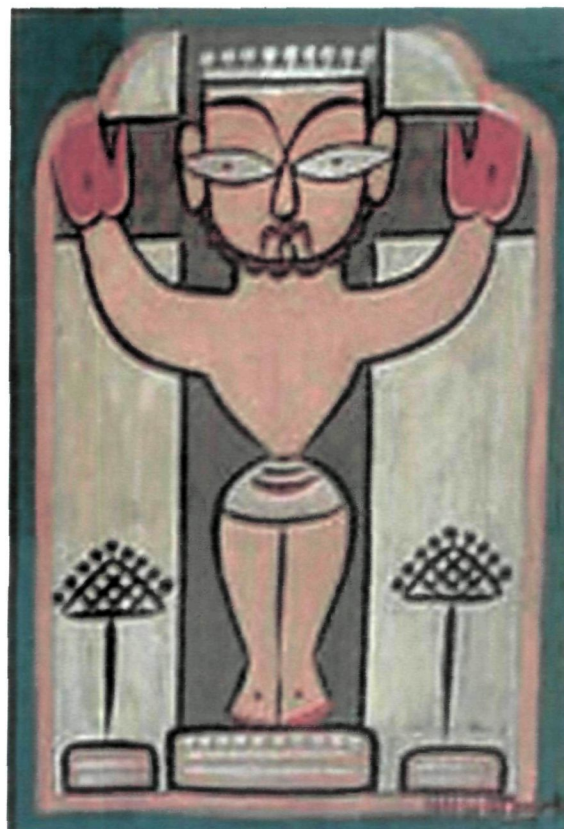
**COLOUR PLATE – 24**  
**SITA'S AGNI PARIKSHA**  
*Painting on Board (17.5"×22")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 25**  
**CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU**  
*Painting on Board (21"×11")*



**COLOUR PLATE -26**  
**BAL GOPAL**  
*Painting on Board (19"×27")*



**COLOUR PLATE - 27**  
**CRUCIFIED CHRIST**





**COLOUR PLATE – 28**  
**KRISHNA**  
*Gouache, Work on Paper*



**COLOUR PLATE – 29**  
**CHRIST WITH CROSS**  
*Tempera on cloth (42×107 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 30**  
**SANTHAL DANCE**  
*Painting on Board (10"×24")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 31**  
**SANTHAL WITH BOW AND ARROW**





COLOUR PLATE – 32  
CRUCIFIXION  
*Tempera on Canvas (88.5×68.5 cm)*



COLOUR PLATE – 33  
FLIGHT INTO EGYPT  
*Tempera*



**COLOUR PLATE – 34**  
**CHRIST WITH CROSS**  
*Painting on Board (21"×9")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 35**  
**JESUS AND MARY**  
*Painting on Board (19.5"×11.5")*





**COLOUR PLATE – 36**  
**RED HORSE**



**COLOUR PLATE – 37**  
**PINK SAREE**  
*Tempera*



**COLOUR PLATE – 38**  
**WOMAN**



**COLOUR PLATE – 39**  
**TEN HEADED RAWAN**





**COLOUR PLATE – 40**  
**KRISHNA LILA**  
*Tempera*



**COLOUR PLATE – 41**  
**MAN AND ELEPHANT**  
*Water Colour on Paper (30.5×30.5 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 42**  
**CAT (Mosaic Style)**  
*Painting on Board (14"×12.5")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 43**  
**LION**  
*Painting on Board (14"×16")*

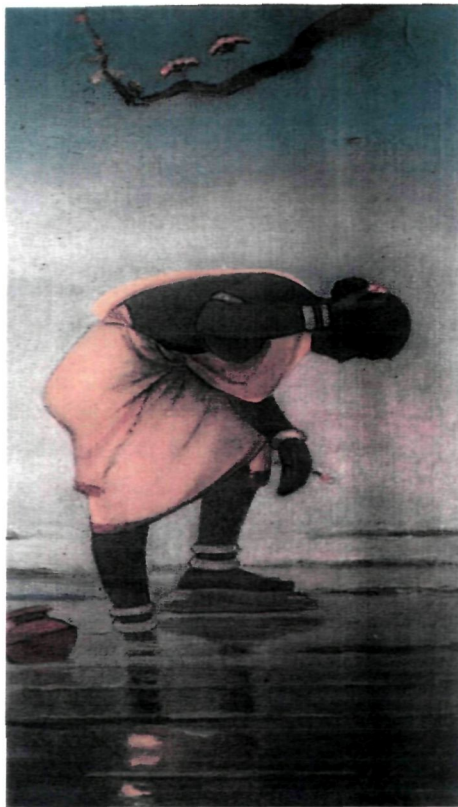




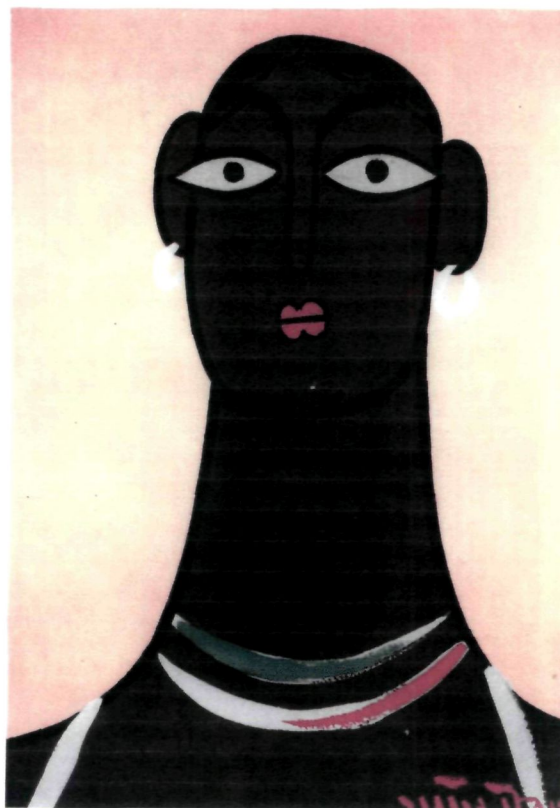
**COLOUR PLATE – 44**  
**CHRIST WITH CROSS**  
*Tempera on Mat (39×64 cm)*



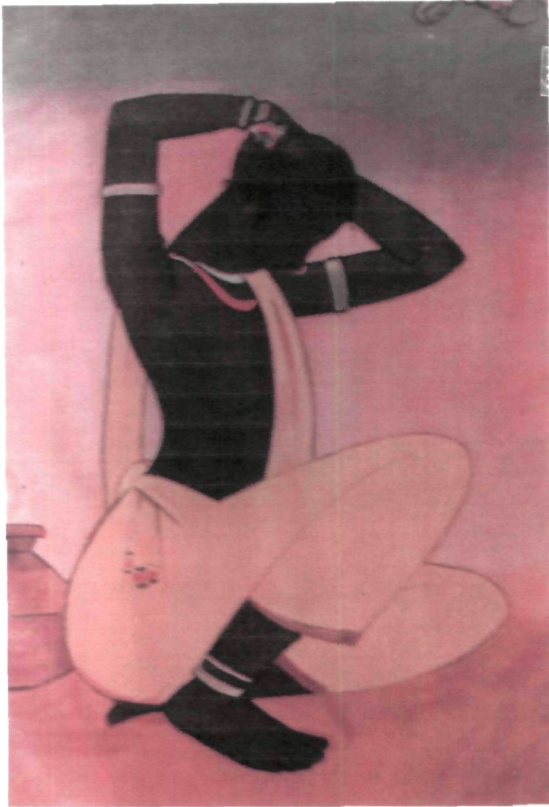
**COLOUR PLATE – 45**  
**MOTHER AND SON**  
*Tempera on paper (30.3"×14")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 46**  
**SANTHAL GIRL**  
*Oil on Canvas (48.5×106 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 47**  
**HEAD OF A SANTHAL**

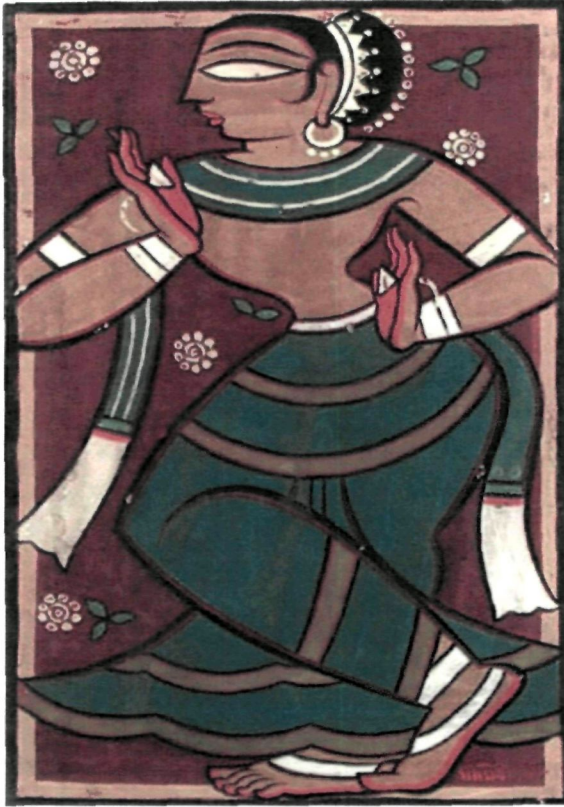


**COLOUR PLATE – 48**  
**TOILET**

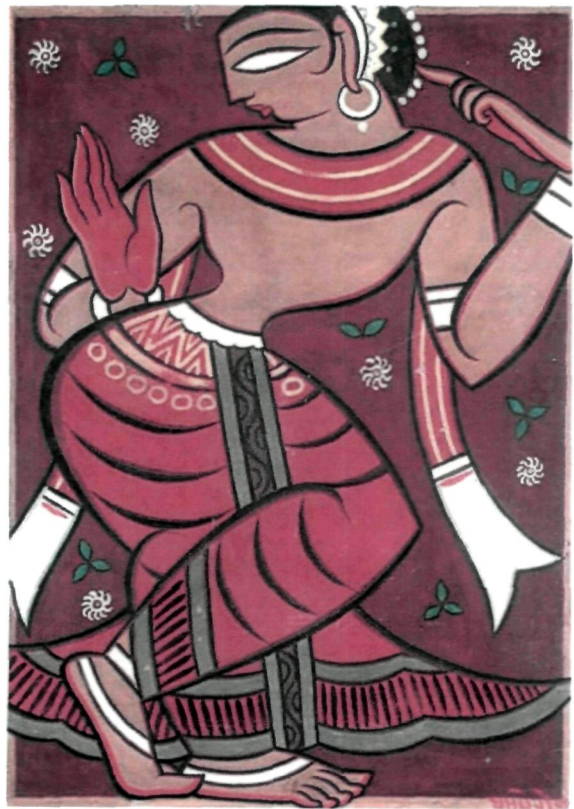


**COLOUR PLATE – 49**  
**MOTHER AND CHILD**





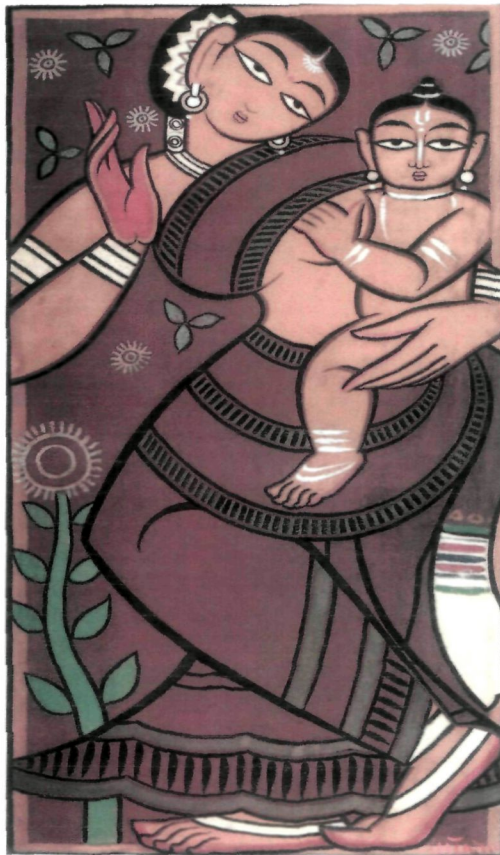
**COLOUR PLATE –50**  
**DANCHING GIRL – APSARA**  
*Tempera on Canvas (19"×11")*



**COLOUR PLATE – 51**  
**GOPINI – RED**  
*Tempera (22"×15.5")*

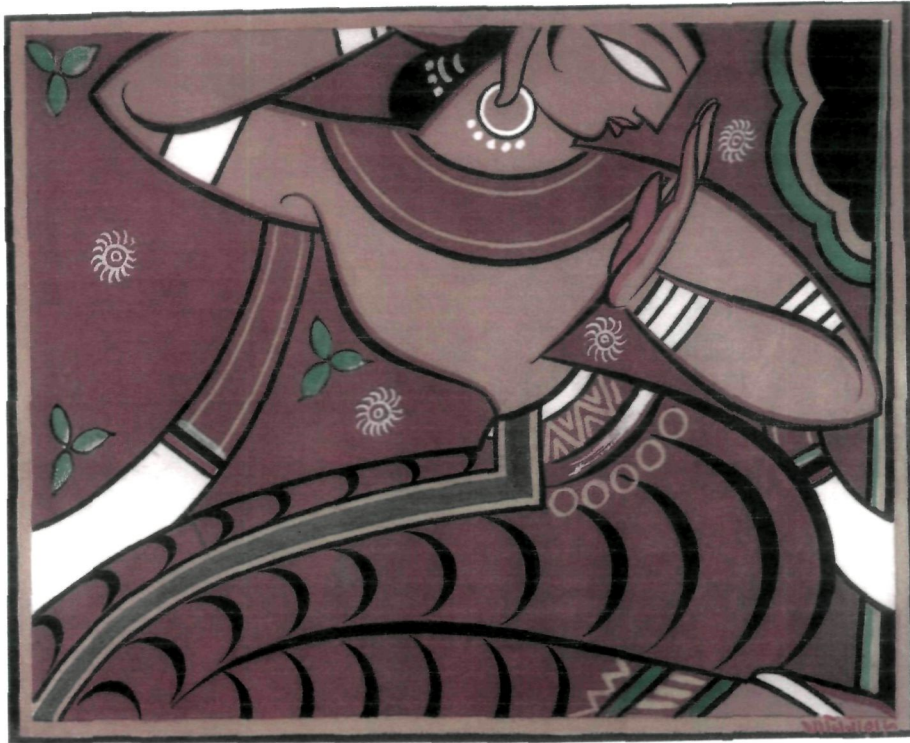


**COLOUR PLATE – 52**  
**THREE PUJARINS**  
*Tempera on paper (36.5×70.5cm)*

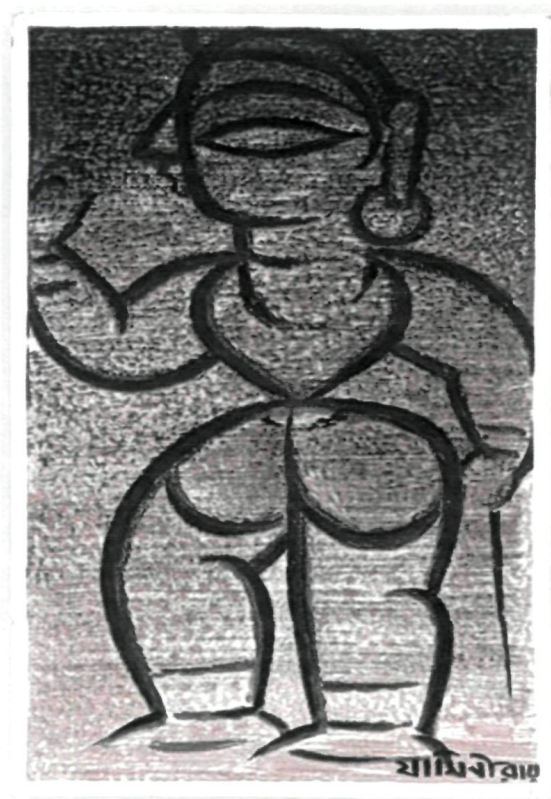


**COLOUR PLATE – 53**  
**MOTHER AND CHILD**  
*Tempera on Canvas (35.7×73 cm)*





**COLOUR PLATE – 54**  
**GOPINI**  
*Tempera on Canvas (68×51.2 cm)*



**COLOUR PLATE – 55**  
**GOPI**  
*Opaque Water Colour on Board*